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A POWERFUL BLOW SENT WINTER REELING DOWN AMONG THE FALLEN LEAVES.

HIS GUARDIAN ANGEL.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

The little station at Enderleigh Green looked impressively dreary in the gloom and fog of the late October evening. A few oil lamps struggled feebly through the mirk, and just succeeded in showing how dense it was, without, however, illumining it to any great extent; and the single porter who wandered disconsolately down the slippery platform, on the look-out for tips that never came, made a forlorn enough figure against the dim background.

The down train had just come in, and after depositing its mail bag and one solitary passenger, had steamed noisily away again, cleaving its way through the darkness like a great red-eyed monster. The passenger—a man—remained at the

the other end of the platform just where he alighted, and the porter looked at him suspiciously as he went up to him and demanded his ticket.

The traveller started, and gave himself a sort of shake, as though to arouse himself from the reverie into which he appeared to have fallen; then, extending his ticket as he spoke, he said, in a low voice,—

"Do you happen to know, porter, how Mrs. Sinclair is—"

He did not conclude the sentence, but broke off abruptly, and even winced as if he feared what the answer might be.

The porter looked at him curiously—making mental notes of the tall, broad, commanding-looking figure.

"Mrs. Sinclair, of the Grange, was you meaning, sir? She be very bad—mortal bad." He shook his head solemnly in order to emphasise his words. "If she lives till morning it's just as much as she will do."

"Then she is still alive?"

There was a ring of hope in the young man's tones, a new-born alertness in which his whole manner partook. Evidently he had feared worse news.

"Yes—at least she were half-an-hour ago, when the groom came over here to send off a telegram. Was you thinking of going to Enderleigh Grange, sir?"

"Yes; that is where I am going. Good-night to you."

He turned away, and began walking with rapid strides towards the little wicket gate that gave access to the road, and the porter had to run in order to overtake him, and make the communication he wished.

"Wait a minute, sir! It is a long way and a lone one to Enderleigh Grange; besides, the night is too dark for you to see your hand before you. Maybe you would like a guide?"

"Nonsense, man!" exclaimed the other impatiently. Then he added, with a harsh laugh, "Why I know every step of the road from here to the Grange, and could find my way blindfold

If there were any occasion for it. However, I thank you for your offer—here's something to buy a glass of ale with."

He tossed a coin to the porter, who fingered it in a professional manner, and then took it to the glimmer of one of the lamps, in order to examine it better, and confirm the pleasant anticipation that its smooth surface had given him.

"Why it is 'arf a crown!" he muttered, gazing at it and scratching his head at the same time. "The gent can be none other than Mr. Cyril Sinclair—come home again after all these years. I suppose his mother, being on her dying bed, has forgiven him. Well, he was always a generous sort of chap, and knew how to throw his money about, for all his wildness. P'raps he's a reformed character now; he's had plenty of time for reformation since we saw him last."

Meanwhile the subject of these meditations was making his way with rapid strides through the gloom of the night, along the muddy country road.

His boast of knowing it was no idle one, for if it had been untrue he would assuredly not have been able to proceed with that firm, unwavering step; and it is more than likely that he would have made acquaintance with one of the two ditches that bordered the highway, and were pitfalls into which, on such a night as this, the unwary traveller might readily stray.

Swiftly as he walked, and careful as he had to be, it did not prevent him from thinking at the same time; and apparently his thoughts were not of an altogether pleasant description, for two or three times a deep sigh, that was almost a groan, broke from him, and once he stopped short, and raised his eyes to the misty sky.

"Oh! if I could but live these ten years over again—oh if I could but redeem the past!" he cried, aloud, with an indescribable mixture of remorse, anguish and despair in his tone, that thrilled out with wild effect on the darkness.

After this he walked on until he came to a pair of large iron gates, upon which the light of the lamp above shone down. Passing through these gates he found himself in a carriage drive, bordered on either side with a thick growth of shrubs, and at the end of the drive there flashed out a faint blurred radiance that indicated where the house stood.

Seen in this universal dimness, the Grange showed merely as a somewhat bulky, gable-ended building, with twisted stacks of chimneys, and a huge oaken door, studded with iron nails—strong enough to resist the onslaught of any number of burglars.

Cyril Sinclair—for the porter had been right in his surmise as to the young man's identity—pulled very gently at the hanging-bell, and his summons was immediately answered by a grey-haired servant in livery.

"Master Cyril!" he exclaimed, starting back, "is it you—really you, sir?"

"It is I, myself, and none other, Stevens," responded the young man, shaking hands with him. "How is my mother?"

"Sadly, sir, very sadly. I will go up and let Miss Meta know you are here, and then she will be able to prepare my mistress."

Sinclair nodded, and while the butler went to perform his mission the new arrival took off his coat and felt hat, and stood in the soft warm light of the hall lamp—a finely built man of about thirty, with handsome features and dark eyes, whose expression was one of haunting sadness.

A minute later, and a light, lithe form came swiftly down the oak stairs, and advanced with outstretched hand.

"Cousin Cyril!" she said, in a wonderfully sweet voice, carefully lowered as if she had been speaking in a sick chamber, "I am very glad you have come. My dear aunt has been watching and waiting for you with—oh! such anxiety!"

"Does she know I am here?" queried Sinclair, only dimly conscious, in his anxiety, of the gentle, and fairylike beauty of the young girl before him.

"Yes, she heard the clang of the gate, at the end of the drive, and some instinct told her it was you. Will you follow me upstairs?"

He obeyed; and she led the way into the sick-

chamber, where a shaded lamp was burning on a table close by the bedside.

Propped up with pillows was a woman of about fifty, or thereabouts, with a face that had once been full of firmness and resolution almost bordering on austerity, but was now white and wan with the pallor of approaching death.

Her eyes lighted up as she saw her son; and Meta, after having seen the young man safely in the room, gently closed the door, leaving mother and son alone together.

It was the first time they had met for nine years, and who shall say what were the emotions that agitated their hearts during those first few minutes?

Cyril remained kneeling, his head buried in the bedclothes. Mrs. Sinclair's eyes filled with tears, and she feebly stretched forth her hand, and laid it on his chestnut curls.

"Mother!" he said, at last, "since I had your message I have travelled night and day in order to come to you, and beg your forgiveness for all the sorrow I have brought upon you. Tell me that my hope has not been in vain!"

"My son," she replied, slowly, and with some difficulty, "the years have brought me wisdom; they have tamed my spirit, and taught me a forbearance that I used not to know; they have taught me my error in dealing with you. If you have been to blame so have I, and we have need of mutual forgiveness. I thank Heaven time has been given me to speak to you once more, for there are many things I wish to say to you, and I fear I have little time to say them. Are you," her voice faltered, "still on the stage?"

"No," he answered, in a very low voice.

She breathed a sigh of relief.

"How have you been getting your living?"

"By journalism," he replied; "you know I always had a sort of taste for literature."

"Yes—yes, I know." She paused a moment as if to collect her thoughts, and he stretched out his hand and enclosed hers in his. Then she went on: "For over six years Meta Rushton has been living with me. She is, as you may be aware, the orphan daughter of a second cousin of mine, and is therefore a relation, although a very distant one."

"Yes!" he said, rather surprised at this beginning; "but why need we talk of Miss Rushton, mother? She is a stranger to me all but in name."

"I know that, and it is for that reason I wish to impress upon you how sweet, how tender and gentle she is, Cyril! One night, four years ago, when I did not know where you were, or what you were doing, when my mind was troubled on your behalf, and I feared you had fallen into a pit from which there was no chance of extricating you, I had a vision, and in it I saw you walking along a rough and stony road, by the side of a horrible precipice. The sky was dark above, and the gloom of the abyss showed dark beneath. Your feet were unsteady; you stumbled, and an awful fear overtook me lest you should fall over the edge of the precipice, and be lost in the black depths of the chasm. I cried out in my agony, and then a voice said to me—

"Fear not. Behold his guardian angel protects him!"

"Then I looked up, and I saw by your side a heavenly form, haloed with light, whose face I recognised as that of Meta. A great joy took possession of me, and I woke up, saying exultantly, 'Meta will save him yet—it is given to her to redeem my son's happiness!'

The sick woman had spoken with such vehemence that she sank back exhausted, and Cyril sprang up and held to her lips a glass of water, which he poured out from a carafe, standing on the table at the bedside. After drinking it she seemed better, and went on, but more quietly,—

"Ever since then, an instinct—or rather let me call it a divine voice—has told me that Meta was fated to become your wife, and with that end in view I have educated her and loved her as my own daughter. She calls me 'aunt,' but never mother loved her child better than I do Meta; and she is worthy of my love. This is what I wanted to say to you, Cyril, so as to prepare the way for the future, and my only fear

was that Death might call me away before I had time to say it. It is very near now. I shall not be with you much longer, my son; but before I go hence, and am seen no more, I ask you to promise me that within six months of my death you will marry Meta."

The young man had listened in silence to this somewhat startling speech, but as his mother pronounced the last words he started violently, and seemed deeply agitated.

"It is impossible!—utterly impossible!" he muttered, not as an answer to her, but as an involuntary revelation of his own thoughts.

Nevertheless, low as he had spoken the words, the sick woman heard them, and seized upon them eagerly.

"And why impossible? She is young, lovely, and amiable. What more could you wish for?"

"Nothing, nothing; only—" he broke off abruptly, and lowered his eyes so as not to meet his mother's piercing glance. "How can I expect the young lady to have me, even if I propose to her?" he asked, with a nervous laugh.

"If that is the root of your objection you need urge it no longer," Mrs. Sinclair replied, calmly. "I have already told Meta of my vision, and to what it pointed, and she is quite ready to marry you as soon as you ask her."

"But, mother, you surely have not exacted from her this promise!" exclaimed Cyril, with startled agitation.

"Yes, I have indeed, but it was a promise spontaneously given. She is, on her part, as anxious as I am on mine to secure your happiness, and she told me that if both you and I wished it she would become your wife."

The young man paced the room in uncontrollable excitement, while his mother watched him from the bed.

It seemed easy enough to see how Mrs. Sinclair's strong will had prevailed over the more flexible one of the young girl committed to her charge, until the latter had adopted her protectress's views, and been ready to submit to any sacrifice demanded of her.

Cyril looked towards his mother.

Her eyes, unnaturally bright, were fixed intently on him; the rest of her features were deadly white, and her thin hands plucked nervously at the bedclothes with an incessant restlessness that made him shudder.

All at once a change came over her face. The white hue turned to grey, and she fell back on her pillows with a low, half articulated moan.

In an instant he was beside her, supporting her in his arms, while her eyes sought his in piteous supplication.

"Cyril—it is coming fast!" she said, in low gasps. "The end is very near—but let me take with me into Eternity the assurance of your happiness—both here and hereafter. Promise me—promise me!"

The young man's face was almost as blanched as her own. It was only by an effort that he prevented a groan from escaping his lips.

"Do not ask me, mother—leave my future in the hands of Providence!" he entreated, very earnestly, but her thin fingers only grasped his arm the tighter.

"No! no! Providence has already pointed out the path; it is for you to obey. Oh, Cyril, if you but knew how much I have thought, and wept, and prayed over you! My son, my only son, do not deny me my dying request!"

And that it was a dying request, it needed not an experienced eye to see, for the deathdews clung damply to the marble brow; and the contact of the clammy hands with his own healthy flesh made Cyril involuntarily shudder.

How could he resist the pleading of that piteous voice—the entreaty of those closing eyes?

To do so would have been more than human; and Cyril, in spite of the hardening influence of a world that had served him rather roughly, was still soft-hearted as a girl of seventeen.

It was no time to debate on the rights and wrongs of a question—no time to argue—and surely if he gave the promise, Heaven would absolve him from its fulfilment!

"I promise, mother!" he said, hoarsely, and



the change wrought by those three words was magical.

The strained look died out of the sick woman's face, her lips moved—smiled even—and she sank back in his arms with a low prayer of thankfulness.

"Now I can die in peace," she said; and Meta Rushton, coming softly in ten minutes later, found the young man still on his knees by the bedside, while, with an expression of ineffable peace on her quiet face, his mother lay back against her pillows—dead!

CHAPTER II.

In the few days that followed Cyril had enough to do in attending to the duties that naturally devolved upon him; and, on the reading of his mother's will, he found himself her sole heir, and the possessor of five thousand a-year, as well as Enderleigh Grange and its extensive grounds.

His surprise was very great, for he had fully expected that Meta Rushton would have been well provided for, and on the morning after the funeral he said something of this kind to her.

Meta was presiding at the breakfast-table, on which the autumn sunshine glittered, showing up the delicate purity of the linen, and sparkling on polished silver and dainty china.

The young girl herself looked wonderfully fair and delicate in the early morning light, the black dress she wore rendering yet more lovely the perfect transparency of her complexion.

She was rather pale this morning, and the blue veins made a visible network on her temples, over which soft little locks of golden hair lovingly strayed.

Her manner was, as it had been all along, quiet and subdued, but she treated Cyril with a friendly unreserve that was quite free from embarrassment, and strangers might have judged from her demeanour that he was, indeed, the "cousin" she called him.

When he made his allusion to the will she flushed a little.

"It was at my own wish that Aunt Gertrude left me nothing," she said. "I entreated her not to do so, because I had no claim upon her whatever."

"Surely your goodness to her since you first came to the Grange constituted a claim!" interrupted Cyril warmly, but Meta only shook her head.

"No; what I did was done out of pure affection, and in gratitude for her kindness. She owed me nothing for it. Besides, I have fifty pounds a-year of my own, and that is quite enough to keep me in comfort!"

Cyril smiled at her innocent simplicity, but he said no more, for he saw that mercenary considerations found no response in her, and an involuntary feeling of admiration took possession of him towards this gentle pure-minded maiden, to whom his mother recognised his guardian angel.

"Will you stroll round the garden with me?" he asked, after breakfast was over; and she at once assented.

It was a fine, exhilarating October morning, with a blue sky, and a mellow softness in the air. The trees, in their golden russet hues, and the Virginia creeper that wreathed the porch with flaming crimson, redeemed the garden from looking dull, even though all the flowers had been beaten down by last week's rains—all, that is to say, except a few clumps of mignonette, which were sending out faint wafts of perfume—summer's last breath of sweetness!

Cyril felt in a new world, as he wandered about those well-known grounds, with Meta at his side.

The peculiar position in which he stood towards her naturally gave him an interest in her, and it was enhanced by her youth and beauty.

She was so different to the women whom, of late years, he had associated with—so different that it was hard to believe she was made of the same flesh and blood.

"I could almost believe myself a boy again, as I see myself surrounded by these scenes of my boyhood," he said, as she looked up with her quick, sympathetic smile.

"Yes; I am sure it must be a pleasure to you to see them once more."

"I don't know," he responded, with half a sigh; "the pleasure is dashed with pain, for it is full of regrets for a wasted life."

"At thirty years of age you cannot say your life is wasted," she returned softly, "for there is yet time left for you to redeem the errors of the past."

He looked at her keenly, uncertain how much or how little his mother had told her, but her eyes were fixed on the gravel, and he only saw the dainty curve of flushed cheek, and the long shadow of her sweeping lashes, from which he was unable to gather any information.

"You know that my mother and I quarrelled when I was twenty-one years of age!" he said, interrogatively, and she merely made a little motion of assent.

"She was most anxious for me to enter the Church," he went on, "and I not only refused to do this, but insisted on going on the stage. With my mother's religious bigotry you may imagine how this step grieved her. She insisted on my giving up the life of an actor, and I—hot-headed and hot-tempered—absolutely refused to obey her. Then she cast me off, and told me she would have nothing more to do with me—"

"She was sorry for it afterwards!" interrupted Meta, eagerly. "She has often told me she acted harshly towards you, and she bitterly regretted it. Years ago she made efforts to find you, but they were futile, and it was a mere chance that, even at the last, her advertisement in the *Times* brought you back to her."

"Yes," he said, "it was, indeed, a mere chance—but, thank Heaven, I did see it! I am not surprised she could not find me, for when she told me, years ago, that I was a disgrace to my name I changed it, and now none of my acquaintances know me as 'Cyril Sinclair.'"

It was just at this moment that their *tête à tête* was interrupted by the appearance of a tall, dark, slight young man, with black hair and moustache, and eager, restless black eyes.

He was the doctor who had attended Mrs. Sinclair in her last illness, and as he came towards them Cyril noticed that Meta shrank back a little—as a sensitive plant does from the touch of rude hands.

After greeting Sinclair and the young girl Dr. Wynter said to the latter,—

"I am charged with a commission from my sister, Miss Rushton. She asked me to give her love, and ask you to come on a visit to her for a few weeks. I need not say how delighted both she and I will be to see you."

Meta coloured painfully, and seemed embarrassed.

Both of the young men were watching her rather intently.

"It is very kind of your sister," she faltered, at length, "but I fear I cannot accept her invitation. I have so much to do—"

"But a change would do you good," interrupted Dr. Wynter, his brows knitting themselves together into a frown. "You have exerted yourself a good deal in nursing Mrs. Sinclair, remember, and you really require a rest."

Meta did not seem to know how to reply, and Cyril came to her aid.

"I think—if you will allow me to say so—that Miss Rushton would have more chance of a rest if she stayed quietly at home!" he said, and Meta cast a grateful glance at him for thus helping her out of her dilemma.

Wynter seemed annoyed at Sinclair's interference. He turned upon him sharply.

"Are you going to remain at the Grange, Mr. Sinclair, may I ask?"

It was now Cyril's turn to appear embarrassed, but he was only silent for a moment, and then said, quietly,—

"I am not quite sure. I have not yet completed my arrangements, but whether I remain or not it will not make any difference to Miss Rushton."

"Pardon me, but I cannot agree with you. Miss Rushton can hardly continue to live at the Grange if you are here too."

This was a phase of the matter that had not struck Cyril, but he was equal to the emergency. "Certainly not," he responded. "I am going to write to my aunt—my mother's sister—and ask her to come and take the housekeeping, so as to permit Miss Rushton to have an entire rest."

Dr. Wynter bowed with sullen acquiescence, but it was clear he was deeply annoyed at the refusal, and, inconsequently enough, he blamed Cyril as being the cause of it. After a few more observations he took leave, and when he was gone Cyril said,—

"I hope, Cousin Meta"—he had adopted the title she had given him, although in reality they were not cousins, but very distant connections—"I hope I shall not be offending your prejudices if I say I don't like Doctor Wynter!"

"I am afraid," Meta returned, with a slightly arch smile, "my prejudices run in exactly the opposite direction. I think Dr. Wynter is very clever as a physician, but—"

"Not pleasant as a man!" added Sinclair, as she passed, unwilling to complete her sentence.

"That was what I was going to say, only I thought it would be ill-natured. He was very good to my aunt during her illness, and very kind to me. I ought not to say anything against him, I am sure."

That same day Cyril wrote to his aunt, who promptly responded to the letter by putting in an appearance.

She was rather older than Mrs. Sinclair, and very prim and precise, added to which she was extremely deaf, and carried about with her an extraordinary instrument resembling a horn, through which you had to speak if you wished to address her.

During the time that followed, Cyril and Meta were naturally thrown a great deal into each other's society, and, at the end of a month, Sinclair was still in the same wavering state of mind as he had been the day after his mother's death.

Prudence warned him that he was wrong to stay, since, by doing so, he was not only exposing himself to temptation, but also leading Meta to suppose that he was willing to carry out the wishes of his mother—of which he knew her to be aware.

And yet he could not tear himself away. The days passed by so swiftly, bringing with them a deeper knowledge of the sweetness of Meta's character—a deeper delight in the charms of her society.

It was so long since he had been given the companionship of a pure, high-minded and refined girl, that it came upon him both as a surprise and delight, and, for the first time in his chequered career, he was tasting the enchantment of love—love in its purest, divinest essence.

Greatly to his annoyance, Dr. Wynter was a frequent visitor at the Grange, and it was quite clear that the object of his visits was Meta.

The young girl herself seemed to be the only person who was unaware of it, but she was so entirely free from vanity or coquetry that it never struck her that the doctor was in love with her.

One morning, Cyril was standing at the hall door smoking a meditative cigar and gazing out into the garden, when, turning round at the faint rustling of garments, he saw Meta coming downstairs, dressed ready to go out.

"I am going to call on Miss Wynter," she said, as she fastened the button of her kid gloves. "You know she is an invalid, who can't get out, and is therefore grateful to anyone who will have a little gossip with her."

"May I accompany you?" asked Cyril, throwing away his cigar; and Meta, with a slightly increased colour on her dainty cheeks, gave a ready assent.

CHAPTER III.

It would be hard to say which of the pair most enjoyed the walk from the Grange to Dr. Wynter's house.

It was a frosty morning, with the keen breath of late autumn lending a crispness to the air, and a clearness to the distant hills, which bounded the horizon.

On their arrival at their destination, they found the doctor sitting beside his sister's couch, engaged in showing her some photographs, which he placed on the table as he rose to greet his visitors.

"Reginald has a perfect mania for collecting photographs," observed Miss Wynter, when they were all seated. "But he is going to give me some of them for crystalium purposes. I want a very pretty face to make into a picture, and I had just selected one as you came in."

"Which one?" asked Meta, who knew that the invalid girl was gratified by an interest being taken in her artistic employment.

"This," answered Dr. Wynter, holding out a cabinet-sized photograph as he spoke. "What do you think of Arabella's taste?"

The likeness was that of a beautiful woman of five or six-and-twenty, a woman with a dark, imperious face, and large, lustrous eyes. A beautiful face, certainly, but one that left an unpleasant impression, for all its loveliness.

Meta was sitting facing the light, and Cyril stood behind her. The two Wynters were opposite, and it chanced that as Sinclair bent forward to glance at the photograph over Meta's shoulder, both brother and sister were looking at him, and were cognisant of the strange change that passed over his face. All the colour left his cheeks, and the expression in his eyes seemed curiously like fear.

He said nothing, however, did not even attempt to examine the photograph, but took a chair that was placed in the shadow of the curtains, and began playing absently with the silky ears of a collie dog that had come to lay his head on the visitor's knee.

"I don't like the face!" Meta said with a little shudder, as she put the photograph down. "All the same, I suppose it would be considered very handsome."

"Rather more of a man's beauty than a lady's," returned the doctor. "What is your opinion, Mr. Sinclair?"

"I agree with Miss Rushton."

"I do not suppose the photograph flatters the original," went on Wynter, still addressing himself to Cyril, whom he was watching intently. "It is the kind of face that would be far more beautiful in the flesh than in a picture. Don't you think so?"

"No," replied Cyril, shortly.

"Ah!" exclaimed the doctor. "Doubtless you know this lady!"

There was quite a moment's pause before Cyril spoke.

Truthful by nature, a war was going on within his breast as to whether he should confess or deny the impeachment. Veracity finally triumphed.

"Yes," he said, quietly. "I have seen her."

"She is an actress, I presume?"

"She is—or was."

"And her name?"

"That I am not in a position to give you!" Sinclair said, coldly and distinctly. Then he rose. "I have to go to the post-office," he observed to Meta. "I will call for you as I come back."

But Arabella Wynter entreated the young girl very earnestly to stay to luncheon, alleging, as an excuse, her own loneliness, and the fact that her brother would be absent during the afternoon on his professional rounds.

Meta was too kind-hearted to withstand these entreaties, so Cyril went away, on the understanding that she would return home before evening.

When the time came for her to take her departure, Arabella pressed her to remain a little longer, until Reginald came back, and could escort her home; but as this was exactly what Meta wished to avoid, she made some excuse, and hurried away as quickly as she could.

But Fate was against her, for hardly had she proceeded a quarter of a mile when she met the doctor, who insisted on getting out of his gig and walking back with her.

It was impossible to refuse his offered escort without absolute rudeness, and rudeness was altogether foreign to the nature of our gentle heroine, who determined to make the best of the situation.

The short November afternoon was closing in. From the hollows faint wreaths of mist were rising, and the distant hills were already obscured in the shadows of evening.

The air was raw, chill, and penetrating, not at all the sort of weather one would choose to be out in.

"Shall we take the short cut through the spinney?" asked the doctor, offering his arm, which, after a momentary hesitation, she took. "It is much nearer than keeping to the high-road."

She acquiesced willingly, but when they were in the little plantation called "York's Spinney," she was rather sorry they had not kept to the more frequented high-road, for it was very lonely here in the shadow of the trees, and far darker than it had been outside.

She tried to walk faster, but her companion evidently enjoyed the *titic-a-tit*, and was determined to prolong it as much as possible.

At last Meta said,—

"Had we not better hurry on! It is growing quite dusk."

"And what of that! Surely you are not afraid?"

"Not afraid, exactly; but—"

"But what?"

"I am anxious to get back home."

"You are cruel to me!" exclaimed Wynter, reproachfully. "It is seldom enough, since Cyril Sinclair's return, that I have an opportunity of speaking to you alone, and when Fate is kind enough to give me one, you are all anxiety to snatch it out of my hands!"

Meta was silent. There was something, both in the words and manner, that she did not like, and she was more desirous than ever of reaching the Grange.

"The time has come when I must speak," went on Wynter, vehemently, coming to a standstill, but retaining his grasp of her arm in spite of her efforts to free it. "I can remain silent no longer. Surely you must have seen how I love you, and that it is the great wish of my life to call you my wife. Meta, Meta! tell me that my hope is not a vain one!"

There was real passion, real pathos, in his voice, and though it called forth no echo from the young girl, it nevertheless touched her.

"Oh, I am so sorry, so very sorry!" she exclaimed, distressfully. "I am afraid I ought to have foreseen this, and prevented it!"

"Don't say that, Meta, or you will drive me to despair. Tell me you will marry me, and I swear no lover that ever lived shall be so true, so devoted to you, as I will be!"

"It is impossible, Mr. Wynter, it cannot be!"

"Why impossible, Meta?"

"Because I do not love you."

"But I will teach you to love me! Only trust yourself to me, and I feel sure I can secure your happiness!"

She shook her head. This scene was inexplicably painful to her, inasmuch as she could not help inflicting pain on him.

For a long time Wynter would not take "no" for an answer, but when he found that she fully meant what she said, his mood changed, and he became too infuriated to remember what was due to his own manhood, if not to her helplessness.

"You are in love with Cyril Sinclair!" he cried, while his dark eyes flashed with wrathful passion. "If he had not come to darken your path you would have been willing enough to accept me as your husband, instead of an adventurer—a spendthrift whose past life will not bear looking into!"

"Hush!" she exclaimed, drawing herself up with a movement full of dignity. "Mr. Sinclair's name may be left out of the question. You have no right to speak of him thus!"

"I have a right, and more than that, I will prove the truth of my words. He is all that I have called him, and if you could see the secrets of his past, you would turn away shuddering.

It is he who is my rival! he who has stolen your love from me. But, by Heaven! I will not sit tamely by while you throw me aside for him—or at least"—he laughed harshly—"I will have one kiss from those sweet lips before he has profaned them."

He had lost all control over himself in his passionate anger, and seizing Meta in his arms he kissed her over and over again—her mouth, her throat, her brow.

"Help, help!" screamed the terrified girl—not however, with any hope that assistance would come, for the spinney had acquired a bad reputation amongst the villagers as being haunted, and not even the labourers would return home from their work through it.

Assistance, however, was nearer than she fancied, for the next moment a man sprang forward from amongst the trees—a powerful blow sent Wynter reeling down on the fallen leaves, and Meta found herself clasped close to the bosom of Cyril Sinclair.

"Come away," he said, after a moment's pause, and drawing her arm through his. "This is no place for you, and I will settle with that gentleman at some future date."

Meta was only too glad to obey, and they proceeded some distance in silence. Then Cyril became aware that the young girl was trembling violently from the effect of the excitement she had just gone through, and he led her to the fallen trunk of a tree which lay across the path.

"Sit down," he said, tenderly, "your nerves are overwrought and unstrung. You will be better presently."

For answer she burst into a flood of tears, and Cyril, with every loving epithet he knew, tried to soothe her.

His own heart was beating riotously, for the murderous impulse that had sprung up within him when he saw Wynter's arms round the girl had told him the depth and intensity of his own love for her, and now her head rested against his arm, and he could see, by the pulsating of the little throat, how violently agitated she was.

Was it wonderful that he, too, should forget all the resolves he had made—all the barriers that divided him from her? Was it wonderful that, just for one moment, he felt himself free to tell her he loved her, and when she nestled closely in his arms, that he should kiss the upturned mouth, while murmuring caressing names that thrilled her through and through with delicious rapture?

Blame him, if you will, but recollect that, after all, he was only human, and the temptation was a very sore one.

It is hard to put happiness away from us when it floats before our eyes and it is only necessary to stretch forth our hands in order to grasp it!

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Meta woke the next morning it was with a vague sense of happiness, that deepened as she remembered the event of the preceding day, and she sprang out of bed and dressed, saying to herself, with a child's joyous delight,—
"He loves me!—he loves me!"

Even Nature herself seemed to share in her new-found bliss, for the pale November sunshine was slanting into the room, and a robin, perched on the leafless branch of a beech-tree near the window, poured out a plaintive little song, that fell on Meta's ears with additional sweetness.

Even before she had ever seen Cyril her interest had been awakened in him by his mother's description, and her enthusiastic nature had made her promise to marry him if he saw fit to ask her, in order that she might devote her whole life and energies to the task of leading him back to that purer life which his mother thought he had forsaken.

Thus the young girl had glided insensibly from interest in the unknown to love for the known, and it seemed to her that no woman could wish for greater happiness than to become the wife of Cyril Sinclair.

On going downstairs to the morning-room she found Miss Trinder already there, her horn

beside her, but no one else was in the apartment.

"Do you know where Cyril has gone off to?" shouted the old lady, who, owing to her deafness, either spoke in an inaudible whisper or bawled out at the top of her voice. "Stevens says he left by the seven o'clock train; but it seems a curious thing that he should leave in this way, without letting anyone know beforehand."

Meta's heart grew cold, but she said nothing, and a minute later Stevens came in, with a note on a silver salver.

"Mr. Cyril left this for you, miss," said the butler.

Whereupon Miss Trinder, who, like most deaf people, was most anxious not to lose a syllable of what passed, demanded to know, in a loud voice, what Stevens had said, and applied her trumpet to her ear for the answer.

While the butler was sending his voice down this alarming-looking instrument, Meta withdrew to the window and opened the note, which was short enough to be read in very little time:

"MY DARLING—for so let me call you for the last time! I have gone away because I dare not, in honour, stay near you any longer. I told you last night I loved you—and Heaven knows I spoke the truth! But all the same, I had no business to have uttered those words, for between you and me lies a gulf, which I fear can never be spanned! Dearest, forgive me! I have no excuse to offer for my conduct, and it will be better not to give an explanation. I can only tell you that Fate has been cruel to me—cruel to us both, indeed, for I believe, in my heart, that I could have made you happy—that I should have striven to do so I know."

"I shall not come to the Grange again for some time, perhaps never, unless you should be annoyed by that man Wynter, in which case you have only to send a telegram to my solicitor, whose address I enclose, and he will let me know that you have need of me. Then I shall come, for it is my duty, as well as my desire, to protect you. In the meantime, I beg you to remain at the Grange, and to look upon it as your home. Alas! I cannot even bid you hope for better times. I have sowed the wind and I must soon reap the whirlwind! But at least I can subscribe myself,—Your friend,

"CYRIL SINCLAIR."

Mr. Reginald Wynter did not enjoy the sensations of being knocked down any more than the generality of men do. Moreover, an extra bitterness was added to the indignity by the fact of his assailant being his hated rival.

After the departure of Cyril and Meta, the doctor slowly rose to his feet, and full of a vindictive desire for vengeance, followed them at some distance.

Thus it happened that he was witness of the embrace that passed between them, and was driven almost frantic with jealousy and rage, at this confirmation of his previous suspicions.

He turned back, and walked with heavy footsteps homewards, revolving in his mind vague plans of vengeance, which gradually took shape.

On his arrival at his own house, he found his sister engaged in putting away the photographs he had brought down for her to select from; and the one she had chosen she had put on one side.

He took it up as he entered, and examined it closely.

"Yes," he muttered, "I fancy I should know the original if I were to see her."

"Are you in love with her then?" asked Arabella, quizzically, as she watched him.

"No; but I am as anxious to see her as if I were. Did you notice how Sinclair started when his eyes first fell on the face?"

Arabella nodded. She had both noticed and speculated on the circumstance.

"I do not see what you can gather from that, though," she added, and her brother did not take the trouble to enter into details, for it was with him an article of faith that a woman couldn't keep a secret.

His plan was to go to Paris, where the likeness had been taken, find out the name of the original, then seek her out, and learn from her what connection linked her with Sinclair.

That there were difficulties in the way of perfect success he knew quite well, but he did not despair, for he had overcome much greater difficulties than these, and, moreover, he had implicit faith in his own abilities—always an important factor in such undertakings.

He was a man, too, who believed in striking while the iron was hot, so the following day he made arrangements with a fellow-surgeon to take his professional work, and the next morning he was ready to start for the Continent.

It was only when he had got to the station, and had taken his ticket, that he learned from the porter—who was only too glad to get some one to gossip with—that Cyril had left Enderleigh Green the morning before. His surprise at this intelligence was extreme, and he wondered whether Sinclair's hurried departure had anything to do with the object of his own journey.

"Perhaps Mr. Sinclair only went up to London for the day!" he suggested to the porter; but that functionary shook his head.

"Ah! no, sir. He said he was going to leave England, and it might be some time before he was back again."

This unexpected incident furnished the doctor with a subject for meditation during his own journey; but it was a mystery to which he could not even guess a key. Being anxious to lose no time, he went straight from London to Dover, and crossed from thence to Calais, where he arrived in the early dawn of a raw November morning. After that he pushed on to Paris, and as it was too late to obtain an interview with the photographer that day, he waited until the next morning. Success crowned his efforts. No sooner had he shown the likeness than it was recognised.

"Oh, yes," said the photographer. "Two years ago you would have seen that likeness in every shop-window in Paris. It is Madame Tosca, the comic actress. She is not quite so popular now as she was then—people say she has gone off, and it is hinted"—the speaker shrugged his shoulders and smiled amably—"that Madame is fonder of *eau-de-vie* than is altogether good for her."

"Could monsieur give me her address?" asked Wynter politely; but in this respect monsieur could not oblige him, for La Tosca was an erratic sort of person, and rarely stayed long in the same place. However, he gave the inquirer certain directions calculated to put him in the way of discovering her whereabouts, and then Wynter took leave and hurried away to see the manager of the theatre where Madame Tosca used to act, and from whom he, with very little difficulty, obtained her address.

All this took time, and it was growing dusk as he found himself in the street where the actress's apartments were situated. Just as he was crossing the road he became aware of a figure in front which struck him as familiar—a tall, broad-shouldered man, wearing a soft felt hat, rather slouched over his face.

"It is like Sinclair!" muttered the doctor, slackening his footsteps. "Is it possible his destination can be the same as my own? At any rate, I can see where he goes."

Keeping some distance in the rear he dogged his unconscious enemy until the latter actually disappeared in the very house to which Wynter was bound. The heart of the latter swelled with exultation—success seemed certain now!

He hesitated awhile, then entered a shop close at hand, and selected a hat like that Cyril had been wearing. It had struck him that if his face were concealed, he would not run much risk of being recognised even if Sinclair chanced to see him; and it was well to provide against all contingencies.

Then he boldly entered the house, passed the *concierge*, but turned back to ask him on what *étage* Madame Tosca's apartments were. Having received this information, he went on upstairs—not with the intention of at once seeking the actress, but with the purpose of waiting till Cyril came out, and thus making quite certain

that the man he had tracked was indeed Sinclair—for it must be remembered that, as yet, he had only seen his back, and although one may be morally certain of the identity of a back, moral certainty is not legal proof!

Madame Tosca's name was engraved on a small brass plate on the outer door, and—oh! good luck!—the outer door was not latched! Wynter gently pushed it open, and found himself confronted by a heavy plush curtain, which hung over the doorway. Beyond this he saw a small ante-room, which gave access to the boudoir or sitting-room, and just opposite was another heavy plush *portière*, which no doubt curtained the door of communication.

Wynter hesitated a moment. Playing the eavesdropper is not exactly a gentlemanly occupation, and of choice he would not have selected the part; but scruples must be put on one side when one embarks in such enterprises as his, and he finally crossed the room very softly, and pulling aside the curtain applied his eye to the keyhole—having first made sure that he would be able to hide himself behind the window draperies in case of surprise.

What he saw was this. A luxurious interior, furnished with much ormolu and gilding, and pale blue upholstery. Flowers were all over the room, and the air must have been sickly with their fragrance. Standing upright by the mantelpiece was the man Wynter had followed, and whose face he was now able to recognise as that of Cyril Sinclair. Opposite him, looting back in an easy chair, and dressed in a gorgeous tea-gown of gold-coloured plush, trimmed with lace and ribbons, sat a woman—the original of the photograph.

Having thus made sure of their several identities, Wynter removed his eye from the keyhole, and applied to it his ear. The pair were speaking French, but Wynter was as well acquainted with that language as with his own, and had no difficulty in following what they said, especially as Cyril's voice, though low, was very distinct, and the lady spoke loudly, and somewhat coarsely.

CHAPTER V.

"I TELL you," Madame Tosca said, negligently, but with a certain doggedness, "I wish to see England, and play the part of a country lady. It would be amusing, *non foi?*"

She laughed, as if she enjoyed the amusement in anticipation.

"I should like to see this country house of yours—this Grange, which sounds so romantic. For a change the life would be delightful, especially as I could throw it up directly I was tired of it."

There was a moment's pause. When Cyril spoke, his voice was very decided.

"And I tell you that it is impossible. I am willing to allow you half my income—nay, two-thirds if you will not be satisfied with half—but only on condition that you keep away from me and remain in France."

"And where will you be, *mon ami*, the while?" she asked, mockingly.

"I shall travel—join some expedition to Africa, perhaps. At any rate, I shall not remain in Paris!"

"You will go to England, perhaps?"

"No. I shall not go to England!"

"You are cruel to your native land," said the actress, still with the same veiled mockery. "Perhaps you have infringed your country's laws; or, perhaps—" She waited a moment, and spoke the next words very slowly. "Perhaps there is a lady in the case!"

Wynter wished he could have seen Cyril's face at that moment, but the capacities of a keyhole are limited, and will not accommodate eye and ear at the same time, so he had to content himself with listening eagerly for the young man's reply.

"My reasons I have already explained, so far as I intend to explain them. You are, of course, at liberty to surmise what you like. I told you before that I absolutely refuse to take you to the

Grange, and I think you know me well enough to see that I intend keeping my word."

"Is this the way most Englishmen treat their wives?"

"Yes!" he answered sternly, "when their wives have behaved as you have. You are well aware that but for the shame and publicity I should have obtained a divorce from you long ere this, and even yet I may do so if you drive me to extremities!"

His wife! Wynter could scarcely refrain from an exclamation of triumph.

La Tosca was silent for a few minutes; then she said, in a softer voice,—

"Can you not let the past be past, Cyril? Can we not begin over again?"

"Never!" he cried, vehemently. "The marriage bond is one that, once broken, can never be renewed. Nothing would ever induce me to live with you as your husband again!"

As he spoke he made a step towards the door, and Wynter, alarmed for his own safety, stepped back, and hid himself behind the drawn window curtains, which were full and heavy and concealed him perfectly.

But the interview was not yet over, for it seemed as if La Tosca interposed herself between her husband and the door, so as to force him to listen to her, for her voice was loud and strident; and although, owing to the distance, Wynter was not able to follow all she said, he heard a few words, now and again, of coarse abuse, that showed him the lady had given reins to her temper, and was reviling Sinclair for his refusal to take her back.

Of what Cyril said it was impossible to distinguish a syllable, for his voice was never raised. Indeed, he seemed to be trying his best to soothe his companion, but without success. At length a series of hysterical screams indicated that the actress had taken refuge in tears, and directly after Cyril hastily left the apartment, passed through the ante-chamber, and so on downstairs.

"Now for it!" thought Wynter, and, boldly issuing from his place of concealment, he knocked at the boudoir door, and, without waiting for an answer, went in.

The actress sprang to her feet, and confronted him haughtily, at the same time demanding his business.

"I beg you to pardon my intrusion, Madame," said the doctor, his quick eye roving round, and noting with little surprise a small revolver lying on the table. "I came to see your husband, Mr. Cyril Sinclair, and to ask him to explain conduct which it is hardly possible to justify. I was not aware until my arrival in Paris that he was married. It was a secret that he preserved very religiously during his recent visit to England."

"And may I ask what there was in his conduct, during his stay in England, that has brought you here?"

"Certainly!" returned Wynter, gravely; "and I shall answer you the more readily, because it concerns you to know. He made love to a lovely young girl, who believed him to be free to marry her."

A dusky red flamed into the actress's still beautiful face. Involuntarily she stretched out her hand, and grasped the revolver.

"He dared to do this!" she muttered, wrathfully. "That then, is the reason he would not take me to England!"

"The young lady lives at the Grange; her name is Meta Rushton," proceeded Wynter, deliberately. "You see, I am perfectly open with you, because I wish you to know the truth."

For all her jealous rage, La Tosca was a woman of the world, and therefore suspicious. Fixing her eyes keenly on her visitor, she demanded,—

"And why, pray, do you take so much interest in having 'the truth,' as you call it, made known?"

"Because I was, and am, in love with the young lady myself!" answered the doctor, deciding that boldness would answer his purpose best. "She would have been willing to marry me if Cyril Sinclair had not appeared and taken her affections from me; and even yet I hope she

may do so, when she knows that he has already got a wife. You see, Madame, I am frank with you!"

"It is well for you that you are!" she replied, with a sneering curl of her handsome lips. "I do not believe in disinterested benevolence, perhaps because I have never experienced it! If, by telling me this, you have a purpose of your own to serve, why, then, I can accept your story as the truth."

"I have a purpose to serve," he admitted; "inasmuch as I want you to write to Miss Rushton and give her proofs of your marriage. It is only right that she should know it, and when she is assured of it, her heart will turn back to me again."

And then he went on to tell the actress just so much of the scene in the plantation as vanity would permit, with the result that she worked herself into a state of jealous rage, furious enough even to alarm him.

She was a woman of such fierce and ungovernable passions that it was not improbable her wrath might be presently turned against himself, and Reginald Wynter, being wise in his generation, deemed prudence the better part of valour.

"Madame," he said, laying his firm though slender fingers on her arm, "permit me to relieve you of that revolver. Your hand is trembling with agitation, and it is possible you may, involuntarily, do yourself an injury with the weapon!"

She laughed mockingly.

"Do you an injury, you mean. Well, perhaps you are right. My hand does tremble. I must take something to steady my nerves!"

She put the revolver down on the table and went to a small cabinet, from which she took a cut-glass spirit decanter; it contained brandy, and she drank a wine-glassful of the fiery liquid, undiluted as it was.

"There!" she said, turning round again and giving a shake to her magnificent shoulders, "I am better now and ready for action. Give me the revolver," for he had taken it in his hand and was examining it curiously, "and I will put it away for future emergencies. As you say, it is rather a dangerous plaything!"

That night, all Paris rang with the news of the murder that had been committed in the Rue G—

Adelaide Tosca, the beautiful burlesque actress, whom everyone had heard of, and nearly every body had seen, had been found in her room lying prone on the floor, her limbs and face soaked through with the crimson blood that had drained away her life. She was shot through the heart!

CHAPTER VI.

LIFE seemed a very dreary thing to poor Meta after Cyril's departure, for he had given no hope of return no hint of the cause that took him away, and the true reason of his absence never once suggested itself to the young girl.

Nevertheless, some instinct warned her that before long she would hear from him, and she nerved herself to endure the interval with what patience she might.

Her instincts had not deceived her, for in less than a week after his departure she had a letter from him.

"I am writing to you to tell you this terrible thing that has befallen me," he wrote, "and I do so because it is inevitable that you should hear it. Better, therefore, that it should be from my hand than from that of strangers."

"Meta, when you have heard my confession you will despise me, and I am almost ready to thank Heaven that I shall not be by to see the look of scorn that will come into your sweet eyes. And yet you are more angel than woman, and so, perhaps, you will forgive me after all."

"Years ago, when I was only twenty-one years of age, I married a woman much older than myself, with the result of blighting my whole life. Of that marriage I will say no more, except to tell you that my wife deserted me, and

that I kept her existence a secret from my mother."

"By some means, my wife, who was an actress, playing under the name of La Tosca, found out that my mother was dead and had left me a good deal of money, and on my return to Paris I found a parenthetical letter from her awaiting me at my rooms, and requesting me to go to her at once."

"I went, and found she wished a reconciliation, which I refused. However, I promised to allow her two-thirds of my income, and I left her. I had hardly reached my own apartments, which were some distance from here, before I was arrested for her murder!"

Having read thus far, Meta put the letter down with a low exclamation of horror. To read of a murder is dreadful enough in all conscience, but that he should be accused of committing it seemed to her, at that moment, even more horrible. Her anxiety, however, made her take up the epistle again almost immediately.

"It seemed," Cyril went on, "her maid, who had been away on an errand, came back, and on proceeding to the boudoir, found her mistress lying on the floor dead. Beside her was a revolver bearing my initials—as a matter of fact the revolver had formerly belonged to me—and that same afternoon, during my visit, my wife had taken it from her writing-table drawer and threatened to shoot either me or herself. I paid no attention to the threat, for I did not believe the weapon was loaded—as it afterwards proved to be. On the couch one of my gloves was discovered, and as it was known that my wife and I were not on good terms, the police imagined there was sufficient evidence to justify my arrest. Things look very black, and circumstantial evidence is strongly against me."

"However, I am innocent, and I do not despair of proving it. My great desire is that you should hear of this miserable business from me—before anyone else has had time to communicate it to you, and so I have begged permission to write to you. This letter will pass through the hands of the prison authorities—for, of course, I am not admitted to bail—before it reaches you; but I earnestly hope they will lose no time in forwarding it to its destination."

Then Cyril concluded rather abruptly, and having come to the end, Meta quietly set herself the task of reading the letter again, after which she began pacing up and down the room, her hands clasped before her, her head bent.

She tried to look at the situation as calmly and dispassionately as she could. Cyril was in danger—his life and honour were both in peril. Apparently he had no friends on whom he could rely—no one to help him in this terrible strait.

It is true he had been to blame for concealing his marriage from her, but Meta was full of pitiful excuses for this fault; she could only see a noble life ruined by the influence of a false wife, and then resorted to her Mrs. Sinclair's oft-repeated declaration,—

"You are his guardian angel—the time will come when you will prove it!"

The time had come, and Meta nerved herself to meet it. All her latent strength of character came to the fore—she felt capable of any exertion—ready for any emergency, and the first thing to do was to go to Paris, so as to be on the spot, and then strain every effort in the task of proving the accused man's innocence—for that he was innocent she never for a moment doubted.

Having once come to this conclusion, she went to Miss Trinder, and, through the mediumship of the horn, communicated to her both the news of Cyril's imprisonment and her own intention of going to Paris. Contrary to her expectation, the old lady at once acquiesced in the plan, and signified her readiness to accompany the young girl—adding that she had never seen the French capital, and the present would be a good opportunity for doing so.

Meta had not viewed it in exactly that light, but she was glad to meet with no opposition; and after telegraphing to Cyril she proceeded to make what preparations were necessary for the journey. Accordingly, the next morning, she

and Miss Trinder were at the station, when the porter, Johnson, professed himself much puzzled by the general exodus that was going on.

"First, Mr. Cyril Sinclair, then Doctor Wynter, then you, miss!" he observed, dolefully to Meta. "Why, soon there'll be no one left in Enderleigh!"

This was the first intimation Meta had received of the absence of the doctor, and although she did not pay much attention to it at the time, it was destined to recur to her, later on, as a fact of some significance.

The journey to London was, naturally enough, a very miserable one, although her mind was all the time busy with her future plans.

It was a strange position for this young girl of under twenty to find herself in, and one whose responsibility might well have made her tremble. But she had no thought for herself—all her hopes, fears and desires were concentrated on the man she loved.

On their arrival at Paddington she and Miss Trinder—who proved herself very docile—drove at once to the office of the late Mrs. Sinclair's solicitor, a Mr. Manning, who was much astonished when he saw Meta, and still more surprised as she unfolded to him her business.

"My dear young lady," he said, "believe me, you had better not interfere with this very sad case—it is not one in which a woman should be mixed up. Let me instruct an *avocat* in Paris, who will take all necessary steps to defend Mr. Sinclair."

But Meta shook her head in a very positive negation. She had put her hand to the plough, and she had not the least intention of turning back.

"No," she said. "Determination can do a good deal, even when it is qualified by ignorance, and no one would be so anxious on poor Cyril's behalf as myself. Of course, a French *avocat* must be employed; but it seems to me as the present stage of affairs a detective would do more good, and it was chiefly to ask you to recommend one that I came to you."

The solicitor could not forbear a smile; it seemed so strange to hear such quiet, business-like words proceeding from those young lips. Nevertheless, Mr. Manning was quite acute enough to recognise that Miss Rushton seemed equal to the situation, and that beneath that gentle, girlish exterior there beat the high courage and undaunted resolution of a woman.

"Very well," he said, "if such is really your determination I can say no more, and I think I can help you to the very man you want. He is a private detective, and his name is Stone. He is not in London at the present moment, but I will telegraph to him at once, and very likely he will be in Paris a few hours after your own arrival there. At what hotel shall you stay?"

Meta was rather taken aback at the question. "I don't know. I had not thought about it," she answered.

"Then let me recommend the Hotel du Louvre; it is central, and therefore will suit you. Shall you push on to Paris to-night?"

Meta replied in the negative. She herself would have liked to do so, but Miss Trinder's age rendered it unadvisable. However, she hoped to reach the French capital the next day.

"In that case, I will promise that Mr. Stone is there before you," observed Mr. Manning.

And his prognostication was verified, for soon after Miss Trinder and her companion had settled themselves in the Louvre Hotel Meta was informed a "Monsieur" wished to see her, and the "Monsieur" proved to be none other than the detective.

He was a thin, spare, insignificant-looking man, with a subdued manner and a low voice, the very last man one would have taken for a detective.

He wore no whiskers or moustache, and his hair was just beginning to turn grey. His eyes, too, were grey, quiet and subdued-looking, as the rest of his appearance; but there was a sort of unobtrusive self-reliance in his demeanour that struck Meta, and made her ready to put more confidence in him than his otherwise insignificant personality would have warranted.

"I have heard part of the story from Mr.

Manning," he observed, taking out a note-book; "but as I wish to lose no detail I must ask you to kindly repeat all you know."

This was not very much, but Meta told it with a prompt clearness that won the detective's admiration.

He made one or two notes, and then put his book carefully away in his breast pocket.

"Thank you. I shall now endeavour to see Mr. Sinclair, and then I will proceed to make inquiries. I will see you again to-morrow evening, and let you know the result."

He bowed himself out, and Meta was left to await, with what patience she might, his report.

She had come to the conclusion that in the interval she had better not see Cyril. There were many reasons for this decision, but perhaps the chief one was a certain madly shy sense that would, under the circumstances, have made the meeting awkward on both sides.

Miss Trinder let her go her own way unmolested.

That selfish old person could not, indeed, help looking on Cyril's incarceration as a means selected by Providence for her own benefit, in order that she might view the wonderful Parisian shops, of which she had heard so much, and her anxiety on her nephew's behalf was considerably tempered by the satisfaction with which she regarded a new bonnet she had hastened to purchase in the Rue de Rivoli.

CHAPTER VII.

THE next evening, punctually to his appointment, Mr. Stone arrived at the hotel, and took out the pocket-book, which seemed to occupy the place of a familiar spirit to him.

"Well!" Meta cried, feverishly. "Have you discovered anything important?"

"All discoveries are important!" he returned, sententiously; "but I don't know whether you will think much of those I have made. I have seen Mr. Sinclair." Meta grew paler, and her hands involuntarily clasped themselves together.

"He is bearing up very well, and gave me full information of his movements on the day of the murder. From his lodgings he went to those of Madame Tosca, with whom he remained about half-an-hour, and then he went straight back to his own apartments. That is all he can tell me. I have visited the room where the murder took place—how calmly he spoke of it!—and I have seen Madame's maid, who, however, can give me very little information beyond this—she found a half-smoked cigarette in the room, which the police, in their search, had overlooked. Now if we can find the man who was smoking that half cigarette we shall find the murderer!"

"But perhaps it was Cyril himself!" hazarded Meta.

"No, I find that Mr. Sinclair never smokes anything but cigars. Another thing, too, is that the cigarette I am speaking of was made in England, for it has the name stamped on the paper. Now, as it is not at all likely that a man would buy English-made cigarettes in Paris, it follows, as a probability, that the owner of it must either be an Englishman, or has lately been in England and purchased it. If that is the case the inquiry is narrowed very considerably, for although I hear of many Parisian friends of La Tosca I find no traces of any English ones. Another person of whom I have made inquiries is the *concierge*. Of course, as the house is a large one, many people pass in and out during the day, and so he does not particularly notice them. However, he remembers distinctly a gentleman asking him the number of Madame Tosca's *étage*, and, from his accent, he imagined the gentleman to be an Englishman. He could not see his face, but he was tall, and wore a soft felt hat, well pulled down over his features.

"You must know that after Mr. Sinclair's apprehension the *concierge* was confronted with him, and then he declared that he identified him as the person who had asked him the way upstairs. Mr. Sinclair then wore a slouched felt hat, and it was chiefly because of the hat that the *concierge* recognised him.

"Later on, the *concierge* left his post, and did not return to it until after the report of the pistol had alarmed the other inmates of the house—he was, I suspect, drinking in a neighbouring inn, and his head was not, therefore, as clear as it might have been. However, he sticks to his assertion that Mr. Sinclair and the gentleman who asked for Madame Tosca are the same. Mr. Sinclair, however, states that he knew quite well on what landing his wife's apartments were situated, as she in her note, asking him to go and see her, gave him the minutest directions. Unfortunately he has destroyed that note, so it is impossible to prove the truth of what he says, and, as a matter of fact, it was his first visit to the house, as Madame Tosca had only been there some six or seven weeks."

The detective paused, and Meta looked at him with anxious inquiry. She, herself, could find no clue in this labyrinth.

"What conclusion have you come to?" she asked, impetuously.

"No conclusion, but my opinion is that Madame Tosca was killed either accidentally, or in a moment of intense passion. The crime was not premeditated. If the man had intended killing her he would not have asked the way to his victim's rooms; he would have contrived to assure himself of their whereabouts beforehand. Then, again, he would not have smoked a cigarette just before he fired the fatal shot. Men's bravado may carry them a long way when they know they have an audience, but it would not go to these lengths at such a moment."

"Perhaps," suggested the young girl, "Madame Tosca committed suicide?"

"No. Medical evidence has proved that to be impossible. I acknowledge, Miss Rushton, that the case is a difficult one, and I cannot advise you to be too hopeful. I shall do my best, of course, but with only a scrap of cigarette as a clue I am a long way off finding the murderer."

He made his adieux, and went out—despondent, as he said. The circumstantial evidence was strongly against Cyril Sinclair.

It was known that he and his wife did not agree, therefore a motive for the crime was not lacking, and although the fraction of evidence Stone had gathered made him ready to give Sinclair the benefit of the doubt, he knew quite well that a legal tribunal would not take the same view of the matter.

For the next few days he confined himself to searching out Madame Tosca's antecedents. Her history was not a very detectable one, but he could find no clue to an Englishman amongst her many friends. Once more he went to the *concierge*, and questioned him concerning the stranger who asked the way upstairs.

"I have told you before, and I tell you again, it was Mr. Sinclair," returned the door-keeper, angrily. "It is no good going over the same ground three or four times. It was Mr. Sinclair who murdered madame, and there is an end to it!"

"Not quite so fast, my friend," murmured the detective, soothingly. "Why are you so certain it was he? Can you swear to the voice?"

"I did not notice the voice so much as the accent. The gentleman spoke French very well, but for all that his French betrayed him as an Englishman. Besides, he wore the same kind of hat—exactly the same as the one Mr. Sinclair had on when I saw him after the murder."

"And that was why you swore he was the same man?"

"Partly."

"And he had the same coat on as before?"

went on the detective.

There was a momentary hesitation on the part of the *concierge*—so slight, however, that a less acute observer than Stone would not have noticed it.

"Well, yes, I suppose he had. Anyhow, he looked the same."

"But you were not sure of the coat?"

"He might have changed the coat."

"Ah, yes—quite so; only that is not the question at the present moment. The point is, can you swear it is the same coat?"

The man did not reply.

There was no more to be got from him, and,

recognising this, Stone went on upstairs to the dead woman's apartments, where her maid was still installed as a sort of caretaker. The maid was a woman of middle age, quiet, sensible and discreet.

Stone had already won her good graces, and she was quite ready to help him as much as lay in her power, only, unfortunately, her ability did not reach as far as her will in this instance.

She had expected the detective, and as he came in she said,—

"Well, have you found out anything in favour of the poor monsieur?" for she also was of opinion that Sinclair had not committed the crime, in spite of the almost overwhelming testimony to the contrary.

"Not to say much, and not to say little," responded Stone, with cautious ambiguity; then, as he took a seat, he added: "Have you found anything in his favour, Ma'amelle?"

The Frenchwoman disappeared for a moment into an inner chamber, and came back again with a small box in her hand. Out of the box she took a scrap of paper, burnt at one end, and much crumpled, as if it had been used as a spill—which was indeed the case.

"I searched well amongst the ashes, as you asked me to—it was a dirty job, *ma foi*! and I found this. I don't know whether it will help you at all, but it bears date the day of the murder."

Stone took it eagerly. No trifle was so small but that it might form a connecting link in the chain of evidence that it was his business to weave; and scraps of paper, even the most insignificant-looking, might prove of the utmost value later on.

This particular one was nothing more nor less than a receipted bill for a felt hat, and, as the maid had said, the date was that of Madame Tosca's death. Part of the heading of the bill was burnt off, but enough still remained to identify the firm from which it was issued.

"A felt hat!" muttered Stone, slowly. "Perhaps the very hat sworn to by the *conciérge* as being like the one Mr. Sinclair is in the habit of wearing! Doubtless the hat was purchased, and the bill was used as a light by the man whose half-smoked cigarette we found. Ma'amelle, can you direct me to this shop?" he said, indicating the top of the receipt.

"Most certainly!" answered Mademoiselle. "It is quite close at hand—three doors to your left when you leave this house."

Stone, in an access of professional excitement, bade her adieu, and soon found himself inside the shop indicated. He fancied that at last a real clue had been found—but whether his fancy was erroneous or not the next few minutes would prove.

On showing the bill to the proprietor of the shop, which was a large one, the latter at once admitted that it was one that had issued from his establishment.

"The initials on it enable me to recognise the assistant who served the article in question," he said, "I will call him if you like, and he will perhaps be able to give you the information you require."

Stone thanked him, and he forthwith called a short, pale young man, who answered to the name of Lepage, and on being asked if the writing on the bill was his replied in the affirmative.

"Now," said the detective impressively, "I am very anxious to have a description of the gentleman who purchased this felt hat. Can you give it me?"

"He was tall, and dark," answered Lepage, without hesitation. "I remember him perfectly, because I was struck with the good French he spoke, considering that he was an Englishman."

"Then you are sure he was an Englishman?"

"Quite sure; there could be no mistaking his nationality, both on account of his appearance and accent."

"Should you recognise him again if you were to see him?"

"Assuredly!"

Stone took from his pockets a photograph of Sinclair.

"Is that the same person?" he asked, but Lepage shook his head very positively.

"Oh, no! It is not at all like him."

This was satisfactory, so far as it went. The point now was to find the purchaser of the hat, and prove that he had been in Madame Tosca's rooms after Sinclair left them.

"You seem to have taken particular notice of him and his attire!"

"I did," answered the assistant, frankly. "When I saw him put the hat on, and pull it over his eyes, it struck me that he wanted it for purposes of disguise, and this notion of mine was confirmed when he left his own hat here."

The detective picked up his cane. Surely he was on the track at last!

"Left his own hat here, did he?"

"Yes. He said he would call for it later on, but he has not done so yet, and that is nearly a week ago. It is the more surprising because the hat was almost a new one!"

Stone asked to be allowed to see it, and the hat was accordingly fetched. It was a tall, silk hat, nearly new, as the assistant said. The name of the manufacturers, "Yorke and Co., Sackville-street, London," was stamped inside, and this Stone made a note of. He also observed another thing—namely, that it was ventilated in rather a peculiar manner.

"Thank you," he said, courteously, as he left the shop, and a grim smile came on his lips when he found himself outside. "Now for London!"

CHAPTER VIII.

POOR Cyril, meanwhile, was, like Meta, suffering those torments of "hopes deferred" which it is truly said "maketh the heart sick." The charge against him was too serious to admit of his being released on bail, so he had to submit to the shame and misery of imprisonment, while in the future loomed a hideous possibility which it made him shudder to think of.

Richly had he paid for the folly of those earlier years, when, breaking from home ties, he had gone on the stage, and afterwards put a climax to his imprudence by marriage with a woman whose name, even then, was linked with dishonour. It is true that, later on, he had tried to redeem the past. He had worked hard at literature, and striven his best to cut himself off from the companions of those old, wild days, with the result that at the present moment he had no one to whom he could turn—no one on whose friendship he could rely, for he had been too despairing even to attempt to form new friendships when he broke with the old ones.

Of course he engaged a lawyer, who promised to do his best to defend him, but Cyril was very hopeless when Meta's letter came, telling him of her intended arrival in Paris, and was followed by the visit of Stone.

Then a sudden inspired belief came to him—his devotion would save him, and his mother's vision of Meta drawing him back from the edge of a fathomless abyss would be fulfilled!

Nevertheless, as the days went on, and he saw neither Stone nor Meta, his courage gave way again, more especially as his advocate seemed to take a very gloomy view of the situation.

The evidence against him, though circumstantial, was very strong, and if it could not be in some way rebutted, it must end in his being found guilty.

It is hard to say whether he or Meta endured the most misery. Even now that she was in Paris, it seemed to the young girl that she could do nothing—only wait until Stone brought her news of some fresh discovery; and waiting, as we all know, is weary work.

Her suspense grew harder to bear when, instead of coming to see her as usual, Stone one day sent a letter to the effect that he was going back to England. Of what took him there, and when he would be likely to return, he said nothing, and two days dragged their weary length along without another word from him.

Then he suddenly reappeared, looking rather worn out with so much hasty travelling, but quiet and composed as usual.

In a few words he told Meta all we have already narrated concerning the finding of the torn receipt, and his visit to the hat shop, and after that he came to the purpose that took him to England.

"I went to the hat manufacturers in Sackville-street," he said, still with the inevitable note-book in his hand, "and I gave them a full description of the hat in question, and the peculiar way in which it was ventilated—for I felt sure that special orders must have been given with regard to the ventilation, and my own opinion was that they had emanated from a medical man. You start, Miss Rushton—what thought has struck you?"

"Nothing, nothing!" exclaimed Meta, driving back the idea that had flashed across her mind. "Go on with your account—please."

"Well, my notion proved to be a correct one, for, after a good deal of inquiry, Messrs. Yorke found that special instructions for that peculiar kind of ventilation had been given by one of their country customers, who invariably had his hats sent down ventilated in such a manner. The customer lives at Enderleigh Green, and his name is Doctor R-ginald Wynter. Ah! I see you are startled."

She was, indeed—startled at this confirmation of the suspicion that she had stifled in its birth as unworthy of her, and even now she could hardly give it credence.

"When I learned this," continued Stone, seeing that she continued silent, "my first intention was to go down to Enderleigh Green and find out all I could about this man Wynter; but second thoughts are proverbially best, and so I decided that you would probably be able to tell me quite as much, if not more, than I could discover for myself."

He looked keenly at the young girl, who was evidently troubled. Her eyes were cast down, her fingers trembled as she laced them nervously, one within the other. She was thinking of that scene in the plantation, and wondering whether it had anything to do with the position in which Cyril was now placed.

"I implore you to be candid with me," said Stone, who was quite aware that some mental debate was going on within her. "If I am to unravel this mystery I must exact perfect reserve, both on your part and Mr. Sinclair's. I believe I have the end of the thread in my hand, and you can probably help me to follow it."

His request was no more than reasonable; and Meta, putting aside her scruples, complied with it.

She told him the history of her acquaintance with Wynter, her visit to his sister, the episode of the photograph (which she now knew to be that of La Tosca), and his proposal to her. This latter fact she made as light of as she possibly could, but Stone appeared to attach much importance to it, and more especially to Cyril's appearances on the scene after she had rejected Wynter.

"It is growing clearer," he said, more to himself than her as she finished. "Can you tell me, Miss Rushton, whether Dr. Wynter was away from home when you started?"

Meta thought a moment, and then the porter's communication at Enderleigh Green station flashed across her mind,—

"First Mr. Sinclair, then Dr. Wynter, then you!" the porter had said, referring to the various departures, and as he put them in their rotation, it seemed a hint that the doctor had left after Cyril, and, of course, before she herself did.

"Yes, yes," muttered the detective, on learning this. "I see it all now. By some means Wynter found out that Mr. Sinclair was connected with Madame Tosca, and thought to make use of this connection in order to revenge himself on one whom he believed to be his rival. So far it is all quite clear. I must now find out where he was staying, and whether he is still in Paris."

"That will be difficult, will it not?" asked Meta, tremulously.

"Not so difficult as you think; as, when he first came, he probably had no motive for secrecy, and gave his correct name. Understand me, Miss Rushton, I do not believe that he left home

with the intention of committing a crime, and I am more convinced than ever that the murder was not a premeditated one."

On leaving Meta the detective sent a telegram to the head of the police department at Enderleigh Green, and received a reply about two hours afterwards. It ran thus,—

"Wynter at home. Returned this day week."

"That was the day of Miss Rushton's departure," murmured Stone, knitting his brows together. "Now for the hotels."

It is wonderful how easy it is to trace persons, even in a great city, when you have reduced the task of looking for them to a science, as had Mr. Erasmus Stone.

In an incredibly short space of time he had found out the hotel where Reginald Wynter stopped, and where, as the detective surmised, he had given his correct name and address.

In addition to other things, Stone found that he had only stayed there one night; that he arrived the day before the murder, and left the very evening the crime was committed.

"Fits in exactly!" ejaculated Stone, rubbing his hands together with a certain quiet, professional triumph. "He was afraid to stay in Paris after the murder, so he probably went to London, and remained there for a couple of days, so as to say his visit had been to the metropolis if any inquiries were made. A cute gentleman, without doubt. But I think I shall be even with him yet."

And the next day saw Mr. Stone at Enderleigh Green, where he took up his abode at the "Bull" Inn, and spent his time very lazily—as it seemed to the onlookers—by loitering about the village, and gossiping with anyone whom he could find ready to respond to his overtures.

If the people with whom he talked had taken the trouble to compare notes afterwards, they would have found that, curiously enough, no matter how their conversation with the stranger began, it was sure to end with a discussion of Dr. Wynter and his doings.

After six o'clock in the evening, Dr. Wynter received his poorer patients for consultation, and of this opportunity Mr. Stone availed himself.

His digestion was wrong. He wanted a tonic. Would the doctor prescribe for him?

Wynter listened to his symptoms, wrote a prescription, and accepted his fee. But after that the patient lingered, chatting easily, and asking the doctor various questions about the neighbourhood.

He mentioned, casually, that he had passed through Paris on his way from Italy, and he was cognizant of the sudden expression of interest that leapt into Wynter's eyes at the mention of the French capital.

"Sit down! sit down!" the doctor said, hospitably. "I seldom get the chance of a chat with a stranger in this out-of-the-way village. Anything particular going on in Paris?"

Stone accepted the invitation eagerly, and pressed on his host a cigar.

"Don't you smoke?" asked the latter, noticing that he returned the case to his pocket without taking a cigar.

"Well, yes; but I don't feel up to a Havannah to-night. If you have a cigarette—"

Wynter at once produced his case, and offered it, observing at the same time,—

"I very rarely smoke cigars myself. I find cigarettes suit me better."

Stone examined the one he had taken very carefully, before lighting it. At the end was the stamped mark which had been on the half-smoked one he had found in Madame Tosca's apartment.

"Ah, everyone is talking about the murder in the Rue Blank," he said, carelessly. "People naturally take an interest in it, and it is likely to become a *cause célèbre*."

Wynter was very pale; and, as he knocked the ash off the end of his cigar, his hand trembled.

"Have they got the murderer?" he asked, in rather a low tone.

"Oh, yes! An Englishman, named Sinclair. By the way, it is strange you did not know that, because I hear Sinclair is a native of Enderleigh!"

(Continued on page 367.)

THE MYSTERY OF ALANDYKE.

—10:—

CHAPTER VII.

BEATRICE STUART loved pleasure as most girls of her age and nature do love it; but within a very few days of her introduction to Mr. D'Arcy she found herself wishing that visit to the theatre had never been paid. She regretted bitterly her brief taste of dissipation, since it had brought on her the acquaintance of this handsome, evil-eyed Italian, against whom every impulse of her nature revolted.

Hitherto Bee had been her mother's favourite. An intensely selfish woman, Mrs. Stuart had yet, after a fashion, been kind and affectionate to her youngest born; but from the fatal March evening, which witnessed the Italian's introduction at Bilby-road all was changed. Mrs. Stuart grew mysterious and unobscure in her manner, until at last it became almost a relief to poor Bee to leave the shabby lodgings, and go out to give her lessons. She wrote to Nell a long account of the stranger, and the troubles that seemed coming, but for once Nell was silent. Hitherto she had been a very good correspondent, but now her letters suddenly ceased. Poor Beatrice was in despair; her pretty childish face grew grave and anxious; her dimples were all gone, and people began to think she must be ill.

Mrs. Ward was the first to notice the change. She had never loved Beatrice as she did Nell, but she took an interest in her for her sister's sake. And so, when in the sweet spring days Bee grew paler and thinner, when her smile waned and her pretty laugh was seldom heard, the kindly woman called her into her sitting-room one May afternoon, just as she was preparing to go home.

"What is the matter, Bee?" she said, taking the girl's hot feverish hand in hers, "do you know, I think you must be working too hard."

The tears welled up into Bee's big, blue eyes, but she did not answer.

"I promised Nell to take care of you," said her kind friend. "What do you think she would say if she came home and found her little sister looking like this?"

"I don't know."

Mrs. Ward felt uneasy; her first idea was that the girl had a lover—Bee was so beautiful and so lonely.

"Has anyone been vexing you? Have you any friend you don't like to tell your mother about?" trying hard to introduce the subject herself, since Bee shrank so from it.

"I don't think I have a friend in the world!" said Bee, with a burst of sobs. "Oh! Mrs. Ward, I wish Nell had never gone away. This misery would never have happened if she had been at home."

Seriously alarmed, Mrs. Ward gently removed the girl's hat, and drew her nearer to herself.

"Tell me all about it, Bee. I will promise to keep your secret."

Beatrice looked into her face and trusted her. A deep blush coloured her cheeks, and Mrs. Ward quite expected to hear a love-story. She was to be disappointed.

"Have you ever seen mamma?" asked Beatrice, abruptly.

"Never," thinking at the time, from all she had heard of the widow, she should not care for her acquaintance; "never to speak to, I mean. Of course I have seen her in church."

"I think she is going mad!"

This was so utterly different from anything Mrs. Ward had expected that she almost smiled in her relief.

"I am quite serious," said Bee, a little offended. "Six weeks ago a wonderful thing happened—someone sent us a ten-pound note in an envelope. There was no letter, no explanation, nothing but the money."

"And surely that did not distract Mrs. Stuart?"

"It was the cause of all," sobbed Bee. "Oh, I wish that money had never come! We had been so dull ever since Nell went and I wanted

a little pleasure so much, I persuaded mamma to go to the theatre."

"Quite right, too. I hope you enjoyed it."

Beatrice shook her head, as though to intimate that she should never enjoy anything again.

"We might have done; only we met him, and he has haunted us ever since."

All Mrs. Ward's former fears returned.

"Saw who, Bee?"

"A horrid man, who says he knew mamma long ago in Italy. He recognised her, and mamma was very pleased, and invited him to supper. He has been three or four times a-week ever since."

"And he annoys you?"

Bee thought a moment.

"He is always elaborately polite to me. I don't think he has said a word I could complain of; but everything is changed. I can't explain it. He encourages mamma to think she is quite a girl. He flatters her till I feel ready to sink into the ground for shame. And she takes it all in, and believes every word he utters. She has changed to me. A little while ago she could hardly bear me out of her sight, now she seems only glad to get rid of me. I fancy he is there whenever I am out. Oh, I can't say it in words. Can't you understand, Mrs. Ward? My mother makes me feel the home is here, not mine. She said last night I was a burden to her."

A kind arm was round her.

"And you think?"

"I think—only it seems too awful—she means to marry this man, to put him in our father's place."

"And what is he?"

Bee shook her head.

"I have no idea. He is always well dressed; but he never seems to do anything. I don't even know where he lives. Mamma makes a great fuss whenever he is coming. She buys things that till now we have never had. Oh, Mrs. Ward, even if he went away there would be trouble. She must be over head and ears in debt just with the expenses of the last few weeks."

"Your mother has a small private income, I believe!"

"Yes, her father left it her. But it would not be enough to tempt him to marry her."

"He may think it is."

Beatrice put one hand to her head.

"If it comes to that nothing shall stop me. I will go away at once. I will starve rather than acknowledge that man as my mother's husband."

"You dislike him so much?"

"I loathe him. When I hear his voice my flesh creeps; if he shakes hands with me I go upstairs and hold my hand in running water, because I feel it soiled—degraded."

"And, Nell, what does she say?"

"Nothing."

"Do you mean you have told her?"

"I have told her everything."

"And she offers you no advice."

"She has not even answered my letters. It is nearly two months since I heard from her. She promised to write again soon."

"She must be ill."

Bee shook her head.

"If she were dangerously ill I think Lady Daryl would have let us know. Any slight illness would not prevent her writing. No, I have lost them both. My mother is wrapped up in Mr. D'Arcy, and Nell has forgotten me!"

"She would never do that, dear."

"I used to think not. But what else would explain it? I wrote again last week, and told her her silence was just breaking my heart. It is five days since I posted that letter, and no answer has come. Mrs. Ward, I feel sometimes as if I were quite reckless, as though nothing mattered any more. I trusted Nell as my own self, and she has betrayed me!"

Mrs. Ward was bewildered. That this little sister was very near Helena's heart she knew. Even if Nell were, indeed, ill she might have got someone else to write and announce the fact. To leave such letters as Bee's unanswered was positively cruel!

"Do you think Nell is happy at Alandyke?"

"Yes," was the prompt reply; "she told me everyone was as kind to her as they could be, and that the children were dear little things."

"Then my idea is of no use. I was wondering if she had left them, and so your letters have failed to reach her. What do you think of that, Bee?"

Bee shook her head.

"I'm quite sure Nell would not leave Alandyke—the salary was large, and she had learned to love the children. No, she is there! Perhaps she has met someone rich and great amongst the guests, who has taught her to forget us."

"No one could teach her that. Bee, I shall write myself to-morrow to Lady Daryl, and ask if Helena is ill. Her ladyship cannot be surprised at our anxiety. What was the date of her last letter to you?"

"March 20."

Mrs. Ward threw up her hands.

"And this is the second week in May! No wonder you feel anxious, Bee! Well, I will soon get news for you; and, regarding the other trouble, don't fret. I think Mr. D'Arcy will soon find out how small your mother's income is, and then he will not find Bilby-road such a pleasant place."

"You are very kind to me."

"Bee, dear, I promised Nell to look after you, and I am quite relieved your troubles are nothing worse. Do you know, I was afraid—"

"You were afraid of what?" and Bee smiled archly.

"I thought you had a lover."

"I shall never have that!"

"I don't feel so sure."

"You may," said Bee, positively. "I don't think I am unselfish enough to marry a poor man, and no rich one will ever ask me."

"And so you are mercenary!"

"Not that; but I am not romantic. I have known such wretched poverty. If I am married I should want to be comfortable."

"You don't think of love then?"

Bee shook her head.

"Love makes people so miserable and exacting," she said, frankly. "I don't think I have a spice of it in me. If anyone would be very kind to me and make me happy I should be fond of them, quietly and sensibly you know. I am sure that is the best sort of marriage."

Mrs. Ward stared at her.

"You are too dreadfully sensible, child, and you are not more than eighteen?"

"That's all. I hope I haven't shocked you. I don't mean I would marry anyone I didn't like just because they were rich, but I am quite sure I should like any nice, kind man who would be good to me and take care of me."

"You are not romantic."

"Not the least in the world. Now, if Mr. D'Arcy were a gentleman, with an estate and large fortune, I dare say I shouldn't mind his marrying mamma a bit."

"You are a strange child."

Bee kissed her and went home. The girl had done herself injustice; she was not mercenary or ambitious, but she had not the least tendency to romance. She was just the sort of girl to make a good wife, be fond of her husband and see to his comfort, but as to hanging on his words, or having a headache if she fancied he neglected her, it was not in her nature.

She was intensely practical; she had far greater beauty than her sister, but she lacked entirely Nell's sensitive, highly-strung organization.

She walked home quickly on this bright May evening. It was not far from six o'clock, for Mrs. Ward had detained her a long time. She had left Bilby-road that morning at ten, and her day had been a long one, and she felt strangely tired as she mounted the steps and rang wearily at the bell.

Once her mother would have come to open the door, full of reproaches at her delay. Once tea would have been all ready and the widow waiting anxiously to begin. Now all was changed. Bee knew quite well she would not see her mother until she went into the parlour.

But the door was opened by the landlady of the house instead of the shabby little servant,

and the woman had a troubled look on her face, half as though she did not like her errand. She returned Bee's greeting civilly enough, told her she looked tired, and added, tea was quite ready. Betsy should bring up the kettle directly.

"Isn't mamma in?"

"No, Miss Beatrice; she went out this morning directly after you."

"And when will she be back?"

"They were in the little parlour now, Bee had thrown herself into a chair, and the landlady fidgeted with her apron uncomfortably.

"Don't you know when mamma's coming back, Mrs. Tibbs? Had I better wait tea?"

"No, Miss Beatrice, I wouldn't do that. Your ma, she won't be back to-night, that's certain."

"Not to-night!" Bee almost screamed; she had never been away from her mother a whole night since she was born. "Mrs. Tibbs, do you really mean it?"

"Yes, Miss Beatrice. Your ma, she called me into this room and gave me a glass of wine to drink her health," Beatrice wondered where Mrs. Stuart had procured this refreshment, "and then she told me she shouldn't be home for a day or two. She said she'd left a letter for you in the bedroom."

Tired as she was, Beatrice started up and rushed into the next room. Yes, sure enough on the dressing table lay an envelope directed to herself, but the writing was not in her mother's well-known hand.

She opened it and read the few lines it contained. Her eyes flashed with indignation as their sense dawned on her.

"MADEMOISELLE,—

"The contempt with which you have treated me, the trouble you have caused your angel mother on my account, free us from any compunction at not preparing you more gradually for our tidings. When this reaches you your mother will be my wife; and as your step-father I may be permitted to observe that I consider she has too long supported a great, overgrown girl in idleness. Mrs. D'Arcy and myself propose to return to Camberwell on Tuesday. Teaching being clearly a poorly-paid calling, I propose, if you remain with us, to employ you in my establishment in the City, where your services would, I think, defray the cost of your board and lodging. My dear wife bids me say she quite concurs in this, and she hopes you will be properly grateful for our kindness. I have the honour to subscribe myself,

"Your affectionate father,

"CHARLES D'ARCY."

Beatrice sank back in her chair, too angry for tears, too miserable for thought. The evil she most dreaded had befallen her—Charles D'Arcy was in her father's place, and already was showing his true character.

Mrs. Tibbs brought up the tray with her own hands. She waited on Beatrice with kindly zeal, but the girl was too heartbroken to eat.

"How could she have done it!" she wondered, "how could she!—oh! how could she!"

"Why, miss!" said the good-natured landlady, "he just flattered her into it—it's easy to see that. Your ma was as simple as a child! Anyone had only to praise up her pretty face, and tell her she looked younger than her girls, she'd have gone to the ends of the world for them afterwards."

Poor Bee! But it was true, and she knew it.

"Tasy are coming back on Tuesday!"

"Yes, miss, for awhile; they don't mean to live in Camberwell; it's too far out for his business."

"What is his business?"

Mrs. Tibbs shook her head.

"I don't know, miss! I asked Tibbs, and he said Italians were mostly in the ice-cream or street organ line; but I should hope, for your poor ma's sake, Mr. D'Arcy was something a little 'igher.'"

She went away, and Bee sat down and tried to think. Nearly all Nell's teaching had come to her; but Camberwell is a cheap neighbourhood, and by most energetic toil she could

hardly count on five hours' teaching a day—it took so much time getting from one place to the other. Then, too, there were the holidays, when payment stopped altogether. A very little calculation convinced Bee that though her income might be enough to defray the actual cost of her keep while she lived with her mother, it would not keep her anywhere alone, unless she established herself in a single room, with a camp bedstead in the corner—a proceeding she hardly liked the idea of, for Bee was a born aristocrat in her tastes and feelings.

"But I won't live with him!" declared the girl, speaking aloud in her vehemence, and looking her pretty hands nervously together. "I'd rather beg my bread in the streets, or sing outside people's houses for a penny, than live in the same house as Charles D'Arcy."

The last alternative had given her an idea. Why should she not sing? She had a sweet, rich, soprano voice; considering her youth, undoubtedly powerful. Singing came as naturally to her as to a little bird. Teaching was hard work, and little profit; but she had heard before of wondrous sums realized just by warbling a few ballads.

She was a striking contrast to her sister. Nell would have suffered any hardships rather than bear the publicity of singing for money. Bee looked forward to the idea under a certain amount of excitement.

"If anyone would only try me! I forgot that."

She never thought of consulting Mrs. Ward. She knew that good woman would thoroughly oppose her idea, and the said idea had taken some hold of the girl's brain. Only one difficulty remained. How was she to gain the introduction which would open to her this golden career?

She was very beautiful—the little sister Nell had found it so hard to leave. Tall and graceful as a sylph, her hair, the brightest shade of gold, reached below her waist when it was unbound from its coils, and one or two short curls fell in rings over her forehead. Her complexion, unlike Nell's, had a soft peach-like bloom, and her blue eyes were fringed with black lashes. Taken as a whole her beauty was of a strange, unusual type, and yet it never dawned upon the girl that her beauty was her best weapon.

It was past seven, but Bee dressed herself with feverish haste; put on her well-worn coat and shabby straw hat. She had not the remotest idea where she was going, only she could not stay in Bilby-road. Before she went to bed that night she must make an effort, and clearly that effort was not to be made in the narrow little street called after Nell's admirer.

After all, it is often chance turns the course of our fortunes. Bee was walking rapidly towards the Green; that paradise of trams and omnibuses must certainly be her starting point. She had stopped for a moment to look at something in a shop, when a tall, handsome man came out of the private entrance to the emporium whose windows had attracted Bee's scrutiny—and was just about to enter the brougham awaiting him when he caught sight of Beatrice, and recognized her as one of his patients. He had attended the Stuarts ever since he came to Camberwell, in rare charity making his bills short and slender in accordance with their purse. He had not seen Bee for a year or two; he was struck by the change in her. He remembered her a pretty, laughing child. She seemed a woman now, aye, and a sad one, judging from the troubled look in her eyes.

"Are you going to cut me, Miss Stuart?"

She had to give him her hand, and to stand there while his keen eyes inspected her face. He was not at all satisfied with what he saw.

"Where are you going so late?" he asked her, a little sharply. When a man of forty-five has known a girl from childhood, he considers he has a right to speak sharply sometimes.

"I am going to London!"

Mr. Clifford stared at her.

"Do you know it is nearly eight o'clock? You can't go to London at this time of night, it's quite impossible! What's your mother thinking of to allow you to dream of such a thing!"

"Mamma's not at home!"

"Not at home!" He never remembered Mrs. Stuart addicted to late hours before.

"She's married!" returned Beatrice, with a kind of choked sob. "Don't you understand; she's on her honeymoon."

There was something in the girl's face—something in the wild expression of her eyes—that alarmed Dr. Clifford. He was a kind-hearted man; he could not have left her there. She looked, as he told his wife afterwards, reckless, desperate. He could not have trusted her alone.

"When the cat's away the mice will play!" said the Doctor, laughing. "Come home with me and see my wife. We were saying, only the other day, we wondered what had become of you!"

Bee had once been to the Cliffords to tea as a child, and the acquaintance had almost dropped since that, so she could hardly have believed the good doctor's statement had she thought of it; but she yielded meekly to the invitation, just because she was too weary and too troubled to think for herself.

Dr. Clifford lifted her into the brougham, and gave the order "home." He had had a hard day's work, and he was anxious for a pleasant, restful evening. He certainly did not want an impromptu guest; but those blue eyes would have haunted him sadly had he left Bee without discovering the cause of her sorrow.

"Now just go in there!" he said, when they reached his handsome red-brick house—opening the drawing-room door. "I'll go and find Mrs. Clifford, and tell her the surprise I have brought her!"

The Doctor's wife was fifteen years younger than himself. She had been a bride when Bee paid her first visit—that was six years ago; but the Clifford's honeymoon seemed a long one by the time the Doctor pressed on his wife's lips when he found her in the nursery, watching the slumbers of her children.

"Nina," he said, simply. "I have brought you a poor girl in great trouble! You remember the Sturats?"

"Perfectly. Poor things, they must be grown up by now! I know one of them has gone to Yorkshire as a governess."

"Well, this is the other one! I met her to-night in Church-street, and she looked as if she'd been stunned by a heavy blow. That old idiot of a mother has just married again."

"Poor women!" said Mrs. Clifford, gravely. "I hope she hasn't been the dupe of some designing man. She had a little money. Where is Beatrice? Of course it is Beatrice Stuart!"

"I left her in the drawing-room."

A pretty woman looked the Doctor's wife, and much pleasanter and younger than homely Mrs. Ward.

"Take off your things," she said gently to Bee. "Of course you can stay and spend the evening, as your mamma is away! What is her new name?"

"D'Arcy."

Mrs. Clifford looked mystified.

"No one in Camberwell!"

"Oh, no. He comes from Italy, I think."

Mrs. Clifford kissed her.

"It must be a hard blow for you. Apart from his being your stepfather, do you like him, Bee?"

"I hate him," said Bee, promptly.

This was not promising.

"And what is he?"

"I don't know."

"Do you mean you have no idea?"

"I have no idea," explained the girl; "but our landlady, Mrs. Tibbs, says all Italians are in the ice cream or barrel-organ line."

"I hope not, for your mother's sake."

"He doesn't tell me in the letter," and she placed the ornate note in Mrs. Clifford's hands. It was the wisest thing she could have done.

The young wife's indignation rose as she read it. She quite forgot it was desirable not to influence Beatrice against her father.

"He must be a brute!" she exclaimed.

"But I'll never do it," sobbed Beatrice. "I'll never live with them, never!"

Enter the Doctor.

"Tea's ready," he said pleasantly. "Little girl, don't be too sure; your mother's your natural guardian till you're of age, you know."

But when he had read the letter he changed his mind at once.

"I think we must have a great discussion of ways and means," he said gravely. "Even if Mr. D'Arcy is not in the ice cream or barrel-organ line, I doubt his home being a right place for you."

They petted her as if she had been a pretty younger sister; they tried, for that evening at least, to make her forget her troubles and warm her in their own sunshine; then when tea was over Mrs. Clifford asked,—

"Do you think you could go on teaching, B-e, and make a little home for yourself till your sister could help you?"

Then Bee told her idea. She did not know that of all Camberwell she had come to the right people for help. No one had ever told her that before her marriage Mrs. Clifford was a concert-singer.

The Doctor and his wife exchanged glances.

"Many people sing well enough to please their friends, dear," said the latter, kindly; "and yet fail to attract the public. It is an arduous career, Bee, and I would not advise it unless you really have the talent."

She looked up with imploring eyes.

"I think I have."

The Doctor crossed the room, opened the grand piano, and placed a piece of music on the desk; it was one of the airs from that best known of operas, *Sonnambula*.

"There is no harm in trying," he said, kindly.

"Let us be your first audience. I promise you we will give you a free, unbiassed opinion, without flattery or harshness."

The blue eyes looked at him with a strange, intense gratitude, and she took her seat at the piano.

CHAPTER VIII.

To her life's end Helena Stuart never quite forgot that moment when sitting wearily on the sofa in the school-room, knowing she had incurred her employer's inveterate displeasure, and that her dismissal from Alandyke was a certainty, she heard the General's strange proposal.

There was nothing could have surprised her more. Lord Carruthers might have won the fancy of many a young girl; he was barely sixty. The halo of many a heroic deed was over his head. He was hale and strong, and he had a chivalrous, courtly manner, and one of the kindest hearts that ever beat.

He stopped his impatient walk, and stood in front of little Nell.

"You do not care for this young man?" he said, gravely. "If he were free you would not wish to marry him."

"If he were free a hundred times I should never marry him."

"Then, my dear, why not come to me? I think I could make you happy. There is a look in your eyes reminds me of someone I used to love. You shall have no wish ungratified, little Nell, if only you will let me make you Countess of Carruthers."

Countess of Carruthers!

What promotion it sounded for the hard-worked music teacher of Camberwell! Lady Daryl's little neglected governess! Nell knew he meant just what he said; that the kind old man would have made her his loved and honoured wife. Her dark grey eyes filled with tears.

"I shall never forget your generosity, never while I live. I think you are the noblest man in the world, only—"

"Only I am too old. Don't be afraid to tell me. I know I could not win your love, but, little girl, believe me many marriages founded on affection are better than those caused by youth's wild passion."

Nell looked up at him.

"I know it, only I don't think it would be so with me. Lord Carruthers, I couldn't be your wife because I do not love you."

"And you mean to leave Alandyke?"

"I have no choice."

"You prefer to let Sir Jocelyn dismiss you unjustly than speak a word to clear yourself?"

"I prefer anything to breaking my word."

The General patted her shoulder approvingly.

"I wish you had been a boy; you would have made such a glorious soldier."

A knock came at the schoolroom door.

Nancy brought in a letter. Nell's trembling fingers could hardly open it. It was very short and very cold,—

"Sir Jocelyn Leigh presents his compliments to Miss Stuart, and considering the lateness of the hour he should not require her to leave Alandyke until the morning. He would come to the schoolroom directly after breakfast, and see if a night's reflection had induced her to make the explanation he had required."

Helena handed the letter to the Earl, who looked very indignant as he read it.

"As stiff as a poker," he muttered; "I don't think Jocelyn Leigh ever vexed me before to-day. I shall take care to let him know what I think of him."

"You promised not to," said Nell, wistfully.

"Dear Lord Carruthers, don't mention my name to him. You have been so good to me, add just this thing more to all your kindness—do not speak of me at all to Sir Jocelyn Leigh."

The General growled. He did not like the request, but he would not refuse her any favour.

"And what shall you do, child?"

"I—oh, I shall go away."

"Home to your mother?"

Nell shivered.

"No, not there. Mamma would be angry. She wouldn't understand. I have a whole quarter's salary Lady Daryl paid me yesterday. That will keep me until I get something else."

The General had an idea.

"I might help you then. If you won't be my child-wife, at least you might let me find you a home. I know lots of people; some of them must want a governess. I tell you what"—and the old soldier waxed quite excited—"I have a niece living in London. You go to her and tell her you have come from me, and I want her to help you. Liza's the dearest girl in the world. Wish I had thought of it before. I'll write to her this very evening, and then she'll expect you. I suppose I must go now"—as the dressing bell rang a furious peal—"but I shall come back in the morning to say good-bye."

He kissed her forehead as her father might have done, and then went away.

Left alone Helena wondered if it could possibly be less than twenty-four hours since she had that conversation with Isabel. What a mystery seemed to hang over Alandyke! Isabel herself was flirting with Harold Yorke. Guy Vernon, forgetful of his betrothal vows, would fain have flirted with her (Nell), and Sir Jocelyn saw nothing of the drama carried on under his very eyes, but imagined Guy was Isabel's faithful lover until seduced from his allegiance by the arts of the designing governess.

"He need not have been so hard on me."

Her soft eyes were full of tears, as though his opinion troubled her very much.

"He was always kind to me till to-day; he seemed to try to make me happy, and I trusted him so. I think I would have believed in him, no matter who had spoken ill of him. His heart is buried in his wife's grave, of course, but he need not have been so cruel."

Poor girl! She hardly knew her own heart, she hardly understood herself, the reason she had refused to be Countess of Carruthers. It was because another face had banished Guy Vernon's image, and a new love was burning at her heart—wild, mad, and hopeless, yet pure and sincere.

"I cannot stay indoors," murmured poor Nell to herself. "I feel as if I could not breathe. I shall go out, the moon is beautiful. I dare say if Sir Jocelyn saw me he would think I was trying to meet Guy. Well, it does not matter; he can't judge me much more harshly than he has done."

She threw a thick crimson shawl over her head.



NELL STEPPED BACKWARDS, LOST HER FOOTING, AND FELL INTO THE DEEP WATER.

and shoulders, and crept softly downstairs to the private entrance to the grounds. She need not have feared detection, dinner was going on, and the whole energies of the household were attracted to the dining-room.

It was a beautiful night; the rawness of the atmosphere had given place to a clear frosty air, and the soft rays of the moon lighted up the grounds with a strange, silver splendour. Nell walked on till she came to a secluded spot some distance from the house, close to a lake, where the children went to slide when the ice was hard. A little cottage stood on the further shore of the lake—Nell had often noticed it—the children always told her Old Nurse lived there, but as she had never seen any signs of human habitation, Nell had rather doubted this statement.

As she stood by the edge of the lake, looking on the clear still water, a great longing came to her that she might end her troubles; life seemed so full of sorrow for her, the world offered little pleasure to poor Nell. Oh! Why had not her father taken her with him on that strange journey, long ago; at least, then she would have known his fate, or shared it!

"What are you doing here?"

Nell started. Before her stood a tall, angular-looking woman, dressed in a quaint costume of grey stuff, with a white handkerchief crossed over her shoulders, and a very stiff white cap. The girl shivered involuntarily; she was not superstitious, but there certainly was something eccentric about the apparition.

"I am only taking a walk."

"You did not come to look for it?"

"No."

"You would never find it, never! The secret was my lady's, it died with her; no one in the world can find it now."

Very much alarmed Nell passed on, and the woman seemed to forget her presence as she stood gravely watching the soft, still water, as though some mystery linked her and its noiseless ripples.

"Five long years," she said, speaking as though Nell were miles away. "Five long years, my darling, you've been gone. I think he's changed more than you'd believe. Oh, I have revenged your wrongs, my child. Five long years, and the terror is on him still! His riches, his home, and his title can't pleasure him. He goes about like one whose life is blighted."

Helena stood like a creature in a dream; she was powerless to move. She seemed spell-bound to the spot, as the old woman took a small trowel from her pocket and began scooping a hole in the ground. Nell never felt sure what she expected to see come up from that hole. Awful visions danced before her eyes—of horrors, such as skeletons and dead men's bones; and yet she could not move—she stood there motionless.

For a long time the search continued, then, apparently, it was successful. The woman dropped her trowel, and stooping down fished up the packet for which she had been groping so patiently. Nell could see it clearly in the moonlight. It was only a pocket-book of moderate size, stained and discoloured with age and exposure.

"He would give years of his life for it," went on the old woman, patting the book with triumphant finger; "years of his life! But he shall never have it—never. He separated me from my child. He would not let me be with her on her deathbed, and he shall suffer for it. Aye, his days shall be a weariness. Nothing can remove the trouble from his heart. No one in the world knows its cause but me, and I will not help him. He shall never have it—never."

She pressed the pocket-book to her heart as she spoke, almost as though it had, even then, been in danger of being taken from her. Then hiding it in the bosom of her dress, she proceeded with the trowel to make a fresh resting-place for it, working laboriously on until the hole was deep enough; then casting many anxious glances up and down, and not perceiving Nell's slight figure, she deemed herself safe from detection, and deposited her treasure, raked the

ground over it with her own hands, and then stamped down the strange grave to make it level with the rest of the path. At that unlucky minute she turned her eyes and perceived the intruder.

She came up to Nell, and the girl's heart sank. She felt almost as if her doom were come; but the woman's mood seemed to have changed. Perhaps the sweet, sad face disarmed her anger, for she only said in a mild, entreating tone,—

"You won't tell!"

"No," said Nell, simply; "it had nothing to do with me. I am only a stranger here."

"A stranger!"—a kind of abject fear came on the woman's face. "What's your name?"

"Helena Stuart."

That name must have had associations for the listener. She turned deathly pale, and raised her hand half threateningly, half appealingly. Terrified beyond her strength, Nell recoiled from that uplifted hand. She staggered backwards, lost her footing, and fell into the calm, deep water, where but half-an-hour before she had so longed to seek her rest.

(To be continued.)

LADIES of high class in China use the daintiest thimbles imaginable, some of them being carved from enormous pearls, ornamented with bands of fine gold, on which all manner of quaint and fantastic designs are engraved. A mother-of-pearl case is always made to keep the thimble in, and with it the Chinese lady has a pair of delicate scissors of finest steel, inclosed in a sheath of mother-of-pearl, with a needle-case to match. The Queen of Siam owns a thimble which was a present from her Royal husband. It is made in the shape of a lotus bud, of the finest gold, and is studded with diamonds, which are so arranged that they form her name and the date of her marriage.



SURELY, SHE THOUGHT, SHE MIGHT EFFECT SOMETHING IN THEIR ABSENCE.

HER GREAT MISTAKE.

—101—

CHAPTER XII.—(continued.)

SOME girls would have fainted or gone into hysterics, but Pussy was quite calm. Her only thought was a great regret she had not allowed Cecil to go to her father and proclaim their engagement, then she should never have been placed in this dilemma.

But she was not quite prepared for all that was to happen.

That very night her mother came to her room—the mother whom she had never seen save proud and determined.

Mrs. Fox pleaded as she had never pleaded before with Pussy to save her son, and the girl refused.

"Selfish, unnatural creature!" cried Mrs. Fox, angry at having failed. "You are destroying your brother through a whim!"

"I am refusing to destroy my own life's happiness!"

"Phew! Mr. Dacres is a most charming man, you must allow."

"He isn't behaving in a most charming manner, mamma."

"And he is an earl's son. Really, Pussy, it is a much better match than any I ever expected for you."

"But, mamma, I have settled a match for myself. I am engaged to be married!"

Then Mrs. Fox's wrath broke out—then she poured the torrent of her displeasure unsparingly on her child.

Poor Pussy had never been so abused in all her life. She put one hand to her aching brow, and tried to realise what it meant. Her mother was threatening her with untold penalties, close confinement to the house, bread and water. Pussy wondered dimly whether she had power to carry all this out, and then she remembered with a pang that her father had started that very

afternoon for Yorkshire, where he might be detained a week.

Pussy had very little sleep that night. When she awoke the next day she expected to find the scene an idle dream—but no! Her door was securely locked on the outside, and the meal, which was presently brought up by Mrs. Fox herself, was nothing but the prison fare duly promised her.

"Well," said Pussy, when she was left alone, speaking aloud to cheer herself. "Well, I never thought I should be treated so like a heroine of romance. But, all the same, it isn't pleasant. Bread and water is not appetizing, and I'm afraid I shall get very thin if I live on it for a week. It reads like a romance! Who would believe that in the nineteenth century a marriageable young lady was locked up and fed on bread and water!"

The first day passed in tolerable comfort; Pussy found books enough to while away the time, but the second was terribly slow, and the third seemed longer than a week of ordinary life. Pussy took a look in the glass and decided that she required a more liberal diet; she was pale and wan, there were dark rims round her eyes, and these last had a hollow, sunken appearance, but she never thought of yielding.

"I never was a beauty," she said, frankly, as she surveyed her own image, "but I didn't think I was as hideous as this!"

Early on the morning of the fourth day she heard the sound of wheels. Looking out she saw her mother and Tony start for a drive. Mr. Dacres was in their company. A strange hope filled Pussy's heart; surely she might effect something in their absence.

And indeed she did. Pussy was, of all the family, the servants' favourite. When the news of her illness had been proclaimed, all the maids had volunteered their assistance in the sick-room, and Mary (Florence's special friend) had been quite injured at Mrs. Fox's resolution to nurse her daughter herself.

Cook confined her attentions to manufacturing

invalid dainties; but when these were discovered untouched a general suspicion arose in the servants' hall that all was not right with their young lady, and no sooner had the door closed on their mistress than Mary, who was voted to the honour by general consent, went upstairs and knocked at Pussy's door.

"Do you feel any better, miss?"

"I am not ill, Mary."

"The mistress said you were that bad you couldn't come downstairs or do anything!"

"I wish you'd come in, Mary."

The key was in the lock. Mrs. Fox had so strenuously forbidden the servants access to Pussy that she had not deemed it necessary to remove it. She had never counted on their affection being stronger than the fears of infection she had so seasonally aroused. Mary turned the key and went in; she gave a cry of surprise as she saw her young lady.

Pussy's resolve was taken.

"Mary, I don't know if I ought to tell you my secrets, but I am too ill to think, and I am sure you will keep them."

"I'll keep them with my life, Miss Pussy."

"My mother has shut me up here because I won't do something she wants."

"Couldn't you run away now, Miss Pussy? The mistress won't be back for another two hours."

Pussy shook her head.

"I have no one to run to, and I feel too weak and ill. Mary, I have got a letter ready. I thought perhaps I might get a chance of speaking to you. I want you to go to the post-office and post it with your own hand, and then send a telegram to my father. He is staying at the Castle Hotel, York; can you remember that?"

"Yes, and what shall I say in the telegram, Miss Pussy?"

"You must send it in my name, remember. Put 'Return at once, nothing is the matter, but I want you.' Will you do this for me, Mary?"

"And glad to, Miss Pussy. But can't I do

anything for you! You do look that white and ill."

"I think I should like some tea and buttered toast, Mary."

But when it came she was too tired and faint to eat it; she drank the tea with feverish eagerness, but she waved the toast away.

"It chokes me, Mary, go at once; I shall feel easier when I know my messages have gone."

And that was the little note which was reposing in Cecil Fane's pocket when he and his cousin Florence made their fatal expedition to Caroline Street.

With the true unselfishness of her nature Pussy said nothing that could alarm him. She only wrote that she wanted to see him very much; would he come to his mother's and thence to the Court; she wanted him so badly, so very badly!

Cecil's impulse was to set off at once, but as we know he was delayed; even in his anxiety to reach Pussy he could not have left Florence to face the mysteries of Caroline Street alone. He caught the express to Westfield, rejoiced his mother's heart by his unexpected arrival, and directly dinner was over announced his intention of calling at the Court.

"They will like to hear of the Countess," he said, laughingly, by way of excuse.

"And I wish you would bring me word about Pussy," said Lady Emily earnestly. "I want to know exactly how she is."

Cecil felt a strange pain at his heart.

"Has she been ill?"

"It is given out that she is dangerously ill, but I can hardly credit it, as Mrs. Fox was out driving nearly the whole of yesterday."

"She would not sham illness," said Cecil, a little indignantly.

"Pussy would not sham anything, but there is a very uncomfortable state of affairs at the Court. Her father is away, and I suspect her mother and that miserable Tony of leaguelling together to make her marry Reginald Dacres."

"Reginald Dacres?"

"He has been at the Court some time; they throw him perpetually in her way. I am not afraid of her yielding, but I think she may have a great deal to suffer, poor child! Ask to see her specially, Cecil, and bring me word how she is."

Cecil did not linger. He went to the Court as swiftly as the carriage could take him, and inquired of the butler for Mrs. Fox. The reply staggered him.

"Mrs. Fox could see no one—her daughter was alarmingly ill, and she could not leave the sick-room."

Cecil stood as one smitten by a sudden blow. He was about to send in his card and request an interview when a well-known step was heard, and he saw Mr. Fox himself advancing.

"Come in," he said, kindly, but his voice seemed almost choked. Then as he led the way to the dining-room, "Have they told you she is dying, my Pussy, the only one of all my children who really loved her father?"

"Dying!" and not even the strength of his young manhood could check the emotion in Cecil's tone, "Oh, surely not!"

"I went away five days ago, left her the picture of health, and they've nearly killed her—her precious brother and his mother between them."

Cecil put out his hand.

"Sir, however this ends, I must tell you something. It was my dearest wish to marry your daughter; she has given me the hope that some day I might ask her at your hands."

Mr. Fox stared.

"Why didn't you speak out, then she'd never have suffered so? Do you know they shut her up in one room and fed her on bread and water because she wouldn't marry a good-for-nothing scoundrel who had some secret of her brother's in his keeping. I turned Tony and his friend out of the house; I have told my wife I will never look upon her face again unless she saves my child. She is sorry; poor woman! It was not all her fault—she was so blinded by love for

the others, she never had any affection left for Pussy."

"Let me see her."

"Who?"

"Pussy. Remember," and the young man sighed, "she was to have been my wife."

"She would not know you."

"Try."

"She is not in her senses; she lies and babbles of things that have never been. Poor child, there's no reason in her eyes."

"What is the illness?"

"Exhaustion. Tony talk of brain fever. Oh! they give it many learned names, but they all mean the same thing—that I'm to lose her."

The door opened abruptly, and Mrs. Fox appeared. She turned to Cecil without any greeting.

"They said you were here; will you come at once? She is asking for you—the doctors say it is the last chance."

Breathless, he followed her into the chamber, where Pussy had passed those awful days of solitude. She lay on a low couch, dressed as usual; her long hair floated over her shoulders, her thin hands were locked nervously together.

"Will he never come?" she cried, passionately, as they entered—"not even to say goodbye to me!"

"My darling!"

In a moment Cecil's arms are round her—in a moment that tired, weary head is pillowed on his bosom, and he calls on her by every fond, endearing name to look up and speak to him. The fierce, wild light of fever dies out of her eyes; she turns to him with confiding trust.

"You won't go away?"

"Never again—I will never leave you again while we both live, Pussy."

She gave him one smile of ineffable sweetness, and her wearied eyes closed in peaceful slumber.

"You have saved her life," said one of the doctors, "this sleep will do more for her than aught else."

Cecil answered nothing; he knelt by the couch, supporting his precious burden. He felt no weariness, no fatigue; an intense thankfulness filled his heart. As the silent hours wore on, and Pussy slumbered still, the first thought his mind had strength for apart from her was of the confession Florence Dane had promised him to make to Alan. He wondered how it had been received, whether those two who loved so dearly were once more undivided. He little recked that even at that moment the fair young Countess of Eldale had left her husband's house, and was a lonely wanderer from everything good and pleasant.

CHAPTER XIII.

We must go back to our hapless heroine, the girl Lord Eldale had found sleeping in the wood, the young wife who had loved him as her own soul, who believed—poor, mistaken girl—that his heart had wandered from her to his first love, Sybil Lady Dane.

It was the evening of that fatal spring day, when the Countess and her husband had so nearly come to an understanding, and yet had parted more estranged than ever, when Florence had set out on her visit to her mother, and the Earl had seen her in the London streets driving in a bansom at Cecil's side.

She had promised his cousin to tell him her secret—had promised that, whatever happened, Alan should know the story of her mother's existence. Her maid dressed her in festive robes, and she sat in the drawing-room, waiting for her husband's return, when, instead of his well-known step, the butler entered, and said a letter had been left for her.

Those cruel lines filled her heart with a blank despair. She never doubted Alan had discovered her mother's existence; that, angry at there being any secret concerning her parentage, ashamed that one so humble as the lonely woman in Caroline-street should claim kindred with his wife, he had resolved to break his vow to "love and cherish her until death did them part," and send her from his side.

This was the letter, and every word of it was stamped on the poor girl's brain as though characters of fire:—

"I saw you to-day, in spite of the pangs you had taken to conceal your movements. I know now that the cause I have long suspected as the reason of our unhappiness is the true one. May Heaven forgive you—I never can! What had I done to you that you should work me such a grievous wrong!—what can I think but that my rank and wealth tempted you to sell yourself to me! Well, you shall have all for which you signed, and, for the sake of the love I bore you, I will keep your guilty secret. You shall be Countess of Eldale, a large income shall be secured you, but I cannot longer bear the torture of living at your side and knowing that you are mine in name only. You shall be screened in every way. I shall give out that I am sent for to the country on important business; my lawyer will call upon you to-morrow, and make all fitting arrangements for your future. Farewell! I have loved you as dearly as man ever loved woman, and you have crushed my heart beneath your feet. I pray that we may never meet again."

"ELDALE."

To Florence the letter bore but one interpretation—Alan had discovered that she had a living mother, and that the breath of scandal had once been busy with that mother's name; he resented the slur she had brought upon his family—resented it so deeply that he would never see her again.

"Oh! my darling," moaned the poor young creature in her anguish, "I would have told you long ago only I feared to lose your love. I loved you so I could not bear to think we might be parted."

The blinding tears rained down her face. Never had she loved her husband more, and he had put her from him—never—never more would she look on that loved face again.

"Oh! my darling," sobbed Florence, "I think if you knew the agony your note has brought me you would forgive me—I think if you knew how fondly I loved you you would not cast me off."

But, quick as lightning, there came to her the memory of the first cold words she had ever had from him—the story of his friend who broke his engagement because his *fiancée's* father proved to be a convict. Florence remembered Lord Eldale's approval of his friend's conduct, and how, when she had asked him if he would have renounced her for a similar cause, he had refused to answer her. If there had been any ray of hope left in the poor girl's heart it died out then.

"It is for ever," she murmured to herself, "and, oh! I have blighted his whole future. While I live he can't take another wife—while I am left to my miserable fate no other love can comfort him. Oh! Alan! Alan! If I could only die! I think if I were dying you must forgive me—if you knew I should never trouble you again you would be merciful to me."

She rose at last, and walked to the centre table;—her feet trembled so that they would hardly do her bidding. She looked at her watch. Only an hour since she sat there awaiting her husband—why, it seemed an eternity!—only an hour ago she had been full of hope and now hope had died out of her heart.

But she was resolved of one thing—she would benefit nothing by the title and riches for which he said she had married him; she would show him plainly that if she could not have his love she wanted nothing else from him.

The lawyer would find her gone when he came with his proposal; her mind was quite made up. That very night she would leave her husband's home, and go to the mother who loved her so fondly; at least, there was one living creature left who cared for her. She would go to Caroline-street, and share her mother's poverty, rather than remain a pensioner on the bounty of the husband who had ceased to love her.

She rang the bell. Her own maid appeared in answer. The household was becoming alarmed, the dinner was spoiling, and yet their mistress had given no sign.

"I shall not dine," said the Countess, in a cold, hard voice, which the girl hardly recognised as her mistress's; "I find Lord Elddale has been summoned to the country, and I—shall join him at once."

Her voice almost broke over the falsehood. She was thinking, as she spoke, that never, never more would she join Alan again.

"To-night, my lady!" asked the maid, in tones of alarm.

"Yes," replied the Countess, firmly. "You will pack up everything you think I shall require for a few days' absence, and order the carriage to take me to Victoria Station."

"It is past nine, my lady."

"Never mind," said Lady Elddale, "I shall be in time for the express train if you are quick."

She herself superintended the girl's preparations; she saw that only the simplest and most useful of her dresses were packed. When the trunk was closed it contained every necessity for a month's absence, but there were no jewels, flowers, or evening toilets, and everything the trunk contained had been bought by Mrs. Fox for her niece's trousseau. There was nothing—absolutely nothing—that had been purchased with Lord Elddale's money; the only present which Florence retained of the many which Alan had given her was the plain gold ring he had placed upon her finger not yet six months before.

When all was ready, she sat down and wrote to the lawyer. She knew him well, for Lord Elddale and he had been intimate in the days when he was a considerably richer man than Alan, and the peer was not one to drop old friends. Mr. Lyster was a gentleman of large heart and warm feelings. Florence never doubted that her husband had confided to him her miserable secret, and she wrote to him in that belief.

"DEAR MR. LYSER,—

"The Earl has informed me of your coming visit and its nature. I cannot write to him myself—for the task would be cruellest pain—for him it would only awake memories he desires to forget. To you, as his attached friend, I commend my farewell. Tell him his letter has broken my heart. I may have erred, I may have wronged him, but with my last breath I would declare I shined through love of him. He was my all; I could not give him up. I could not risk losing his love, and I knew I should lose it if he heard my wretched story. Tell him that, his love being gone, I desire nothing else at his hands. I will go my way, he can go his; only, with my last breath, I shall pray for his welfare—only I would, with all my heart, that I could and my life, so that I might not stand between him and happiness. Do not try to seek me; this is my fixed determination; nothing will change it. I thank you for the kindness you have ever shown to her who once was

"FLORENCE WARBURTON."

(To be continued.)

AN African chief's umbrella is of greater importance than many people suppose. Apart from its enormous size, its loss in battle more than equals the loss of a standard of a European commander. Some of the umbrellas are of prodigious dimensions, being no less than 25 ft. in diameter, with ribs 12 ft. 6 in. long.

A BEAUTIFUL Sacred Song entitled "The Good Shepherd" has just reached us. The words and music are by Ernest Brown. The words are simple and affecting, while the melody is a wonderfully pretty one. We have also had sent us Eula Wheeler Wilcox's delightful lyric, "Whatever is best," set to music by A. Stanley Winn. The songs are published at 2s. each, but any reader by mentioning this journal can obtain either song direct from the publisher, Thomas Holloway, 73, New Oxford-street, London, W., for 2d. in stamps. The two songs will be sent for five penny stamps.

HIS GUARDIAN ANGEL.

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(Continued from page 561.)

The doctor seemed confused. In his efforts to appear uninterested he had overreached himself.

"Ah, yes! What I meant was, are they sure he is the guilty man?"

"He stands a very fair chance of being convicted," returned Stone, gravely; and there was silence for a few minutes, while Wynter smoked on, staring moodily at the fire.

"Have you been in Paris lately?" asked the detective, presently.

"No, I had some thoughts of going there about a fortnight ago, but I changed my mind and took a little holiday in London instead."

Then rather a startling thing happened, for Stone rose from his chair, took a step forward, and laid a heavy hand on his companion's shoulder.

"No, Dr. Wynter, you did not change your mind," he said, very quietly, and very distinctly, "for you left here on the fifteenth of November, and went straight to Paris. Wait a minute; don't interrupt me until I have told you what you did there, and your purpose for going. You went because you were in love with Miss Meta Rushton, who, in turn, was in love with Mr. Sinclair. You hated Sinclair, and you saw your way to get rid of him as a rival by finding out in what way he was connected with the original of the photograph which you showed him one morning, and which he recognised as someone he knew. Am I right so far?"

Great beads of perspiration stood on Wynter's brow, his very lips were white. The end of the cigarette had dropped from his nerveless fingers, and his eyes were fixed in a fascinated gaze on the detective.

As he was thus confronted with a secret which he had imagined was unknown to anyone save himself, he became absolutely incapable of speech.

"You stayed at the Hotel B—," went on the quiet, incisive voice; "and from the manager of the theatre where she last played you found out Madame Tosca's address. In the afternoon you went to see her, but before that you had gone into a shop, close at hand, and bought a new soft felt hat, which, by some strange oversight that I cannot account for, you failed to get rid of, for I saw it lying on your hall-table as I came in, and there was the name of the firm you got it from inside. You went to Madame Tosca's; you smoked a cigarette there, and you lighted it with the receipted bill of the hat that you were then wearing. Is it not so?"

Still Wynter did not reply. There was in his eyes the expression of a wild beast when it finds itself unexpectedly trapped. The detective, as he went on, dropped his voice into a lower key,—

"When you left Madame Tosca's room she was lying dead on the floor, shot by her own revolver. You hurried away to your hotel, and the first thing you did was to change your shirt, for there were blood-stains upon the cuff, and you were afraid of what they might betray. You had a fire lighted in your room, and you cut off the right cuff, and burnt it, leaving the shirt behind you when you went from the hotel. Again I ask you if I am not speaking the truth!"

As a matter of fact, the detective was stating his own theory, based on the discoveries he had made, rather than what he knew to be absolute facts; but, as it happened, his sagacity was not at fault, and Wynter found himself confronted by evidences of his own sin.

His head drooped on his breast, and a deep groan burst from his lips,—

"In a word," continued Stone, his grasp tightening on the wretched man's shoulder, "I accuse you of murdering Adelaide Tosca!"

Wynter sprang to his feet—a long, deep shudder thrilling through his limbs. Who his accuser was he knew not; in his agitation he did not even try to guess.

The detective had, as he intended, taken him

at a disadvantage, and the doctor felt himself helplessly at his opponent's mercy.

"I did not murder the woman!" he cried, vehemently. "I took the pistol up intending to put it out of her reach—for her passion frightened me—and it went off. I put my hand on her breast, and found her heart had ceased beating, and then I was stricken with terror, and I left the house without anyone seeing me. If it had happened in England I would have given myself up, but I did not know what the French law might be; and, besides, I hardly knew what I was doing in my terror!"

"You knew enough to make you burn your blood-stained cuff," with extreme deliberation, "and you were content afterwards to let an innocent man bear the penalty of your crime."

Wynter was silent. He was not a good man. He would have done Cyril an evil turn if he could; but for all that he was not so steeped in wickedness as to wish to see him convicted of murder, when one word would have been sufficient to prove him guiltless. Fear alone had prevented Wynter from speaking that word, but conscience, meanwhile, had not been silent, and bitterly had he repented of the revengeful motive that had made him seek out La Tosca.

The detective had succeeded beyond his most sanguine hopes. Certain as he himself felt concerning the part borne by Wynter in the murder, it would have been difficult to prove it to the satisfaction of a jury; so Stone determined on taking a bold step with the purpose of entrapping the doctor into an admission, and as we have seen, he had been so far successful.

Suddenly Wynter turned upon his accuser. "Who are you?" he exclaimed, "and why have you thus hunted me down?"

"I am a detective, employed by Miss Meta Rushton on behalf of Mr. Sinclair," was the imperious reply; "and as, from the first, I have declared my conviction that Madame Tosca's death was the result of an accident, I am quite ready to believe that what you have said is the truth. I bear no animus against you, and if you will take my advice you will return to Paris, and give yourself up to the authorities there. You will have to be tried, of course, but you will be acquitted, for it will be impossible to prove premeditation."

"And you will bear witness against me!" cried Wynter, with a bitter sneer.

"No! With the release of Mr. Sinclair my part in the affair ceases, and as I was privately employed my discoveries will remain a secret between me and Miss Rushton. This is your alternative. If you decline it, I shall get a warrant for your apprehension, and you must bear in mind that when you are once under arrest your tale will bear a very different complexion. It is the act of an innocent man to surrender himself; but a guilty one would concoct some such story as yours when he found himself in prison."

Wynter recognized the justice of the detective's argument. He was still in the dark as to how Stone acquired his knowledge, and how far it extended; indeed, the mention of the incident of lighting the cigarette with the receipt for the hat made him fancy there must have been a witness to his interview with Madame Tosca, and he felt that he was virtually in Stone's hands.

That Meta, even if she fancied him guilty, would be quite ready to do all she could to give him a chance of escape, his knowledge of her character induced him to believe. Yes, the detective was right, and the easiest and simplest way out of the dilemma would be to deliver himself up to justice, while giving an account of the accident.

"I will go with you to Paris to-morrow morning," he said, and Stone would have jumped for joy if he could have reconciled his dignity with such an unbecoming proceeding. As it was he simply said, "You have done wisely," and left the house, taking with him the hat which had been the cause of Wynter's betrayal.

The detective's confidence in human nature could not have been great, for he watched round Wynter's house all that night, unmindful of

cold and fatigue, and early in the morning he and the doctor set out for Paris. Not for one moment did Stone let his companion out of his sight, until he saw him disappear within the wide doors of the police-office whither he had gone to surrender himself to justice!

There is little more to add. Cyril was of course, liberated, and at the trial that followed, although Wynter's dilatoriness in giving himself up was severely commented on, he was found "not guilty," and thereupon released.

But, under the circumstances, he decided not to go back to Enderleigh Green, so he sent for his sister to Brussels, and there set up in practice, with a very fair chance of success.

And six months later Cyril and Meta were married. It was a very quiet wedding, and the only guest besides Miss Trinder, was Mr. Erasmus Stone!

"I must ask him out of pure gratitude," Meta had said, "for if it had not been for his exertions," she shuddered a little as she said this, "you would never have been saved!"

"Nay!" Cyril replied, drawing her closer to him, and gazing down fondly into the sweet eyes and fair flushed face, "I am quite ready to acknowledge that Stone did his best; still my gratitude is not due to him, but to you—you, my guardian angel, to whom Heaven had allotted the task of my rescue!"

And so after all Cyril was able to redeem his promise!

[THE END.]

THE HEIRESS OF BEAUDESERT.

—30—

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE WHITE CAT.

FRAU SCHMIDT was not a coward, but a lone woman might be forgiven for being nervous, with a crowd outside who were likely to have disapproved of her late doings, and only a rickety front door between herself and their violence. Instead of answering it, she gathered her children round her and trembled.

She had meant to hurry out and get them some food, but now she was glad she had not gone, for she might have come back to find them murdered. She pressed them to her bosom, and wondered how much longer the door would stand those vigorous knocks.

"Go to the door," said little Franz, who was terribly hungry; "perhaps it's the lady come to give us something to eat. She said we weren't to be thin any more. Be quick, mother, be quick!"

Curiosity as well as her son's entreaties drew her into the front-room. She opened the window and put out her head, calling out, in a voice querulous with agitation,—

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves for persecuting a poor widow. I've done nothing to harm you, so get along with you."

"My good woman, you are quite mistaken," said a voice, which she instantly recognised as that of a gentleman. "I've no bad intentions towards you. I've brought a doctor to see a sick man."

She vanished from the window at once, and reappeared at the door, quite shocked at having kept the strangers waiting. She begged them to walk in, but told them in the same breath that the young man had been taken away in the lady's carriage, under charge of the police.

Lord Daintree looked much annoyed.

"You don't know where he was taken!"

"The policeman seemed much put about because the lady wished to have him, but I think she gave way at last, so they took him to the hospital."

"The hospital!" inquired Dr. Jones, an English doctor, who was practising in Vienna; "pray which hospital do you mean?"

"That's more than I can tell, for I never heard the name."

"What are we to do?" asked the Marquis.

"It is a long way to the police-station—but it will be better than going the round of the hospitals. As there were no limbs broken I wonder that they didn't take him to his own lodgings."

"They took care to dress him like a gentleman before he left," put in Frau Schmidt, looking from one to the other with curious eyes.

"How absurd! As if that mattered!" exclaimed Lord Daintree, in disgust.

"I think it was to please the lady."

"Then, depend upon it, he's at De Ravigny's. Let us go there at once."

They drove off at a rapid pace in the direction of the Count's splendid house, and as soon as their carriage was out of sight Frau Braun appeared on her door-step.

"Well I never! You'll soon be too grand to live alongside of such as us. What did those swells want, poking their noses where they were not wanted?"

"It wasn't a swell, but a doctor, and I fancy you'd have wanted him fast enough if you had been lying half-dead on the floor."

"I didn't know he was a doctor," sullenly.

"Did he give you anything?"

"No, but the lady did, and I wanted just to step round the corner, and get a bit of food for the children. They've had nothing inside them all day but a crust."

"You run before the shops are shut up, and I'll keep an eye on them," bustling across the road, willing to be of service to her neighbour, but also intending to have a share in the good things when Frau Schmidt came back.

After a few minutes spent in tidying herself up, Frau Schmidt came hurriedly out of her door, shut it with a bang behind her, and ran down the street. But however fast she went a man who had watched her went faster still, and stopped her just before she reached the corner.

He gripped her roughly by the shoulder, and her knees knocked together, as she recognised Georg by the light of the lamp.

"You split on me," he said, menacingly; "and I'll wring your brats' necks. They couldn't say anyhow that it was more than manslaughter, so I should be sure to come back some time, and whenever I come back I'd do it; just you remember that!" holding his fist threateningly before her face.

"Are you mad?" she gasped, her very lips whitening as she thought of her little ones. "I'm not the one to do ill to a neighbour, and I can hold my own tongue—only let me go."

"I don't want to keep you," with a jeering laugh. "You used to be a nice enough sort of body once, but now you are too thick with the police to please me."

"Thick with them!" she cried, indignantly. "When they've took away my lodger, that paid me regular!"

"Ay, and who split on your lodger, and played the sneak but that pal of yours the carpenter!" with a malicious look.

She started.

"I don't believe a word of it!"

"Then why did he come in sneaking as if he was a workman, no better than any of us! And why did he go away dressed like a gentleman in good broadcloth, and in a fine carriage? I didn't see it myself, but there were others who did."

"It's all a puzzle; but there was no harm in him," and drawing her shawl over her chest she hastened round the corner.

Georg broke into a mocking laugh. It followed her as she went hurrying on through the cold night air, and strengthened her purpose of getting away from him as soon as she could.

The lady had talked of lodgings in some other part of the town; and, perhaps, away from the filth and misery of the street in which her lot had been cast, there might be a better life in store for herself and her children.

A quarter of an hour later she returned home, her arms laden with fresh bread, a couple of large sausages about half-a-yard long, a

packet of coffee, a tin of milk and a pound of sugar.

After something very like starvation this was a regal feast, and Frau Braun was asked to share it, to her own great satisfaction.

The children's eyes grew bright, and a slight colour came into their wan little cheeks after a steaming cup of coffee.

"Oh, mother!" said Franz, as well as he could speak, with a large piece of sausage in his mouth, "I think that lady must be the Empress, or she couldn't have given us all these things."

"Ay, neighbour, who was she?" asked Frau Braun, her curiosity growing now that her hunger was appeased.

"A very grand lady, that's all I know, and a very kind one, bless her heart!" lifting little Rose in her arms to prepare her for bed. "It's not true that there isn't any good amongst the great folk; only it always seems as if they drove so fast in their carriages that they could not see the misery they passed by."

"Of course you are bound to stick up for them," and Frau Braun laughed, as she wiped her mouth on her apron, and took up her coffee-pot which she had lent for the occasion. "I'd stick up for anyone who gave me such good sausages as those. Good-night! I'll come again as soon as you have such another nice supper to offer me."

Frau Schmidt took up the lamp to light her friend down the stairs, and as soon as she had shut the door, went into the front room to see if she had closed the window. The room had a cold, desolate air, with no fire in the stove, the disordered bed, the blind flapping in the wind, the dead body of the cat stretched out upon the floor.

With a shiver she shut down the window and hurried away, glad to get back to her children. She wondered at the nervous horror with which she was possessed, reproving herself sharply; for surely a child could not be so utterly silly as to be frightened of the dead body of a cat, and ill-tempered enough so long as it had the power of hissing and scratching.

Nobody had liked it except the hunchback, and he seemed to be wonderfully partial to it, taking it to sleep with him in bed, and feeding it always in the morning before he would touch a taste of his own breakfast. He used to boast that Afra was the cleverest animal in the world, and much more useful to him than any servant with two legs.

"Poor man! he would be right sorry for the little beast," said the kind-hearted woman to herself, as she lay down on her wretched bed, and felt as happy as a mythological queen, because there was a chance of her children being kept from starvation.

Bertha Schmidt's virtues had been frozen up by the bitter frost of adversity, and only yesterday she had seemed to her neighbours a sour, discontented woman, with a sharp tongue and a querulous temper. But one gleam of sunshine melted the frost, and she went to rest with a thankful looking forward to a happier to-morrow.

She dreamt that Bertha had gone to school and won a splendid prize of a golden cat, with emerald eyes; that Rose had got a lovely new frock of stuff as thick and warm as a blanket—a ground of dark blue, with white cats embroidered all over it; that Franz was a lady's page, holding her umbrellas and her prayer-book when she went to church.

On the prayer-book there was a large cross, and on the handle of the umbrella there was a tiny cat in ivory.

As she looked at it the cat grew and grew until it was a great deal too large to stand on the handle of an umbrella, and it had just joined its four feet together ready for a spring, which filled her with unaccountable terror, when she woke up with hands outstretched to keep it from her, her heart beating fast, and a cold dew upon her forehead.

She laid her head down again, inclined to consign every cat in the world to perdition, when she suddenly heard a miaow. Now a miaow is not a terrible sound at any time, but at this especial moment it acted upon her nerves in such

a manner that she would have preferred the roar of a tiger, without calculating consequences.

Again it came, and she sat up in bed, feeling obliged to listen. In the midst of her unreasonable fright a practical fear crossed her mind.

For the first time for many days she had a small store of provisions in the house, and a stray cat might have got in, and might be then in the act of consuming them. She sprang out of bed, caught up a shawl, which she threw over her shivering shoulders, hurried to the door, and out on to the landing, the boards striking cold and chill to her bare feet.

There she stood still, listening with all her ears; the coffee, the ends of the sausages, and the loaves were downstairs in the room she called her kitchen, though little was cooked in it, but the mewing came from inside the door of the room that had been her lodger's!

Afra was dead, and dead cats make no more noise than defunct human beings. With a certain amount of curiosity and fear, she pushed open the door gently, as if there were somebody behind it who was likely to hear.

The moonlight was streaming in at the shutterless windows, making the room as light as day; and there in the middle of the floor, straight in front of her, sat the figure of the hunchback, as if he had never stirred from his lodging, and he was fondling his white cat, which was purring on his shoulder!

With a cry she rushed back to her own room, and locked the door. Then she threw herself on her knees by her children, and prayed that Heaven might keep both her and them from ghosts and all evil things.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MATRIMONY—A PRESCRIPTION

THE Marquis de Daintree and Dr. Jones, after driving to the Count de Ravigny's, arrived at No. 6, Emperor-street, about ten o'clock at night. Rex Verreker seemed in such a dangerous state that it was impossible to leave him alone.

The doctor proposed to send for a nurse, but Lord Daintree objected, saying that a German would never understand the wants of an English patient, and that his own man, Phillips, would be better than any of them.

"Then what do you propose to do to-night?" asked Dr. Jones, taking up his hat; "for I assure you he is not in a condition to be left by himself."

"Send for Phillips at once, put the medicines into his hands and the general charge of the patient, because he understands that sort of thing far better than I do; establish myself on the sofa in the other room, so as to be ready if wanted."

"It is very good of you to take all this trouble. This Mr. Verreker must be a great friend of yours," said the doctor, innocently.

Lord Daintree smiled. Was the man who had robbed him of the only thing in life he cared to possess to be called a great friend? It sounded as if he must be an enemy, and yet he could not bring himself to hate Verreker as he did Colonel Darrell.

He even felt a genuine pity for him lying there, so helpless and troubled, with no remembrance of the lucky chance which had but just cleared the clouds from his future. Poor fellow! he must have suffered terribly during the last day for the shock of relief to have had such an effect on him!

Of course there was the blow on the back of his head thrown in as an extra cause, but he did not believe that it had much to do with it.

"Well, I must go," said Dr. Jones; "but I'll look round the first thing in the morning. You don't want me any more to-night!"

The Marquis looked embarrassed.

"To tell you the truth I am perfectly famished, and I should like to have some food; besides, I must go after Phillips, or else he won't know anything about it. What is to be done?"

"These Germans go to bed so early," muttering his brow in anxious thought; but I think I might get hold of the landlady before she puts on her nightcap. She's a delightful woman, and never minds any amount of trouble for the sick. I'll go and see after her."

He mounted the stairs rapidly, for his time was precious, and soon came back, followed by Frau Bernhardt, a comely-looking widow, who bowed to the Marquis, asked a few directions of the doctor, and then taking a seat by the bedside declared her perfect willingness to remain until it was quite convenient for some one else to relieve her.

She was speedily left alone, for the Marquis had never been so hungry in his life before, and the supper which he ate that night at his hotel made the waiters open their eyes.

Sir Barnabas, delighted at the recovery of the despatch, copied it with his own hand, and then sent it off just in time for the night mail. Thus Rex Verreker was saved from the ruin which was prepared for him, and Lady Blank was delighted that she was not to lose her favourite.

Deeply concerned to hear of Verreker's illness she immediately proposed to have him transported to the British Embassy that he might be nursed under her directions; but this Dr. Jones peremptorily forbade, declaring that it was impossible to move him, and adding that if he were a friend of his he should be sorry to leave him to the tender mercies of a fine lady.

Fine ladies, according to his theory, were only meant to be ornaments of society and nothing more. If they meddled with everyday business they were sure to make a mess of it. A patient would be worried out of his life one day with too much care and attention, and the next, if a dance or any other piece of gaiety turned up, he would be left without medicine or food.

The Marquis laughed and thought of Marie de Ravigny, the sweetest woman he had ever seen next to Lady Valerie. He did not think that there was much chance that she would neglect Verreker if she once had the pleasure of nursing him.

On one pretext or another she drove up to the door with her mother or one of her sisters every day, with fruit or flowers for the patient, or a book to amuse Lord Daintree; and the Marquis, glad of any relief from the monotony of the sick room, would run down to the carriage and spend ten minutes or a quarter-of-an-hour on the pavement, in a pleasant chat, to the delight of the gossip who were always on the look out.

The Count de Ravigny had been much annoyed by his daughter's proceedings on the day of the riot. All sorts of reports floated through the city and it was generally believed that socialism was spreading fast through the lowest stratum of society. This belief almost grew into a panic when it was known that a socialist prisoner had escaped from the hands of justice. The police declared that he was locked up securely in a cell about half-past seven o'clock in the evening, after having been thoroughly searched, and after the charges against him had been written on the register. In the morning the door was found locked, but the prisoner had vanished.

It seemed to them little short of a miracle, for it was equally impossible for there to be a traitor amongst their own force as it was for a man to creep through the keyhole, and other mode of egress there was none.

The escape was the talk of the city, and Zebedee Slesman's name was bandied from mouth to mouth, with all kinds of horrors attached to it. The poor and credulous asserted that he could get through closed doors and thick walls by the aid of a cat who worked spells for him. The better educated feared that he was the head of a determined band of socialists, who had sworn to ruin all who, by position or birth, had not to work for their bread.

Some went to bed in bodily fear lest the beautiful city should be burnt over their heads, others laughed and said when there was real mischief brewing these men were sure to hold their tongues. There was too much talk at present for any real danger to exist.

The Count de Ravigny one day came home in a great rage. It had been insinuated that his daughter, the Countess Marie, knew something about the hunchback's escape. It was known that she passed some time in the house where he lodged, which proved that she had an interest in him.

It was suggested that papers were found on his person with which she had more to do than it was convenient to divulge. It was said that the police had seized her carriage, and compelled her to go home in a common fly, all of which showed that she had put her pretty little feet in a perfect flood of hot water.

The Count, a small, thin man, with a nearly bald head, a good line of features, and a heavy, white moustache, worked himself up into a passion, and sent for his daughter.

She came to him, looking so pretty, that he had scarcely the heart to scold her, but he remembered that her future might be seriously compromised by these reports, and he drew himself up with an air of severity.

He ordered the same prescription—"matrimony"—as had been prescribed for Lady Valerie; but it was rejected with supreme contempt.

Rex Verreker was, she instinctively guessed, out of reach, and if she could not marry him, much less would she marry Count Gropo, who had a bald head like her father, a red nose of peculiar construction, a voice that sounded like a crow's with a sore throat, and a habit of grumbling from morning till night.

"You must marry," said her father, bringing his fist down on the slender drawing-room table with his most decisive air; "and Gropo, who honours you with the offer of his hand, would be a splendid match!"

"I don't want a splendid match!" exclaimed Marie, with spirit; "splendid matches are always detestable people—ugly, old, and horrid!"

"You talk like a foolish child!" frowning angrily. "Is it necessary for me to explain to you that it is better to be the wife of a man in a high position, whatever his age may be, than to marry a younger man who has nothing but a title to offer you?—a nonentity like Prince Rafo, for instance—who has no brains, and no principles!"

"No, you needn't remind me of it at all," her pretty lips breaking into a smile. "I wouldn't have either, even if the Emperor went down on his knees and asked me to; but I know my dear old father can't want to get rid of me, so I shall settle down for a year or two at home."

"Child, you don't know what you are doing," trying to look angry, although his heart could never remain hard to his favourite daughter. "Count Gropo is not the man to ask you a second time, and you are not likely to have such another chance."

"Heaven forbid! I'll make a present of it to somebody else."

"You can't afford to with all these reports going about. There never was a scrape into which you did not try to put your nose," he added, with vexation. He felt that he had not played the part of a stern parent to any purpose, for there was a provoking smile on his daughter's lips, instead of a tear in her eye.

"The Marquis de Daintree!"

The announcement took them both by surprise, and they turned round with flushed faces to greet their guest.

Lord Daintree smiled.

"I'm afraid I'm not wanted."

"Indeed you are!" exclaimed the Countess, with vivacity; "my father has been giving me such a scolding!"

"I want to marry her to the best *parti* in Vienna," said the Count, drawing forward a chair; "and believe me, she turns her nose up at him."

"I dare say he wasn't half good enough," with an Englishman's ready depreciation of a foreigner.

"Much too good, on the contrary," went on De Ravigny, feeling more and more aggrieved as he remembered of what service such a brilliant match would be to him.

"Now, my dear, you ought to say that isn't

possible," exclaimed Marie, her eyes sparkling with fun.

"I never can say things, but I feel it isn't possible."

"Well, the only thing to be done is to send her away if she won't marry, and Heaven knows where to send her!" with a dolorous sigh.

"Try England! It will take all the romance out of her."

"My only friend there is the Milor Beaudesert, but I can't pack the girl off without an invitation."

"Why not? Lady Valerie would be delighted."

"Much obliged," said Marie, stiffly, all her pride flaring up at the sound of the name which had hung on Rex Verreker's lips; "but I would prefer staying where I am."

"That's exactly what you can't do," said the Count, irritably; "Vienna, thanks to your pranks, is much too hot to hold you. But, however, you can go down to our own place, and see what country air can do for your character."

"The country in winter is detestable," turning to the Marquis; "don't you think so?"

"Not I; but if I didn't shoot or hunt I might certainly vote it a bore."

The Marquis, as soon as he reached Verreker's lodgings, sat down and wrote a note to the Earl of Beaudesert, the purport of which may be guessed.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A WELCOME LETTER.

It was quite an amusement to the inhabitants of Emperor-street, to see the number of grand carriages which stopped at No. 5.

Fashionable women, who had not much to occupy themselves with, were glad to find such a pleasant object as the good-looking young Englishman for their attention; and Lady Valerie might have felt jealous if she had seen the number of pretty faces which assumed an air of anxiety as the question was asked, "Is he better?"

Thanks to three people—the Marquis, the doctor, and the valet—Rex Verreker mended faster than could have been expected. The fever abated at the end of a week and his brain grew clear, but it was some time before the clouds cleared away. When at last he looked into Lord Daintree's face, with full recognition, the words that leaped to his lips were, "The papers—were they in time?"

"Quite in time; I gave them into Sir Barnabas's own hands, and you should have seen his face! He looked as if he could eat them!"

"It wasn't so bad for him as for me. Good heavens! when I think of it!" leaning his head on his pillow, pale with emotion.

"Here, have something!" pouring some brandy-and-water into a glass; "and you are not to talk of exciting topics. I have my orders from Jones."

"Any letters just tell me that"; with suppressed eagerness.

"One or two," with an assumption of carelessness which wouldn't have deceived a child. "They'll keep."

"No, no! give them me, quick!"

"Not I. I couldn't face Jones if I did."

"But I will; 'pon my soul I can't rest without them."

The Marquis gave in, feeling as if he would be a brute to triumph over the other's weakness. Getting up from his seat he unlocked a drawer in a bureau, and produced a bundle of mislaid letters of every sort, kind, and description.

Verreker turned them over with hasty hands.

"I'll be content with this one," he said faintly, as he tore it open and perused it with eager eyes.

It was short and hurried; but those few words, written on the paper with the de Montfort crest, were like the elixir of life to him.

"Beaudesert Castle, Dec.—

"DEAR MR. VERREKER,—

"If you don't come to us at once we shall never forgive you. Good-bye is out of the question between old friends when one of them is in trouble, and the mere suggestion makes you deserve a scolding. Perhaps 'the hole' won't be as large as you thought,—perhaps papa will be able to help you out of it, and into a better one. At any rate, come and talk it over. Your room is waiting for you, and the heartiest of welcomes. My father bids me tell you this; he trusts to your honour not to throw us over like mere acquaintances. Remember what I owe you!"

"Your old friend,

"VALERIE DE MONTFORT."

The tears came to Verreker's eyes and he would have kissed the little note if only Daintree had taken himself off; but the Marquis sat immovable as a rock, having seen the letter, and guessed the contents, it was a bitter enough pill to digest.

He was beginning to grow philosophical, though, for he was not the sort of man to pine eternally for a girl who liked somebody better; but as yet he could not contemplate the idea with any pleasure that sooner or later she must belong to another, especially when that other was only two feet or so from him.

However, he could not help smiling grimly to himself at the thought of what a funny quintet there might be some day at Beaudesert—Verreker with Lady Valerie on one side, and Marie de Ruigny on the other, with Floeste Springgold and himself to look on!

What would the little coquette do when she found all her admirers fall her! She was spiteful as a disappointed cat, as he found out that night at Scarsdale, when she first showed her claws.

She had poisoned his mother's ears against Lady Valerie, she had taken in Lord Beaudesert's discarded servant on purpose, as he felt convinced, to worm any secret out of him; and a woman who meant mischief usually found a means to carry it out.

Still, with Marshall, Verreker, and himself to form a body guard round her he did not think much harm could happen to the heiress of Beaudesert, let Colonel Darrell weave his spells, and Floeste Springgold invent her lies till both were tired of falling.

As he thought of Darrell he grew in a fidget to get back. The absence of the faithful trio might expose Lady Valerie to all sorts of dangers, against which she, in her innocence, and her father in his ignorance, might be quite defenceless. As soon as Verreker was on his feet again he would hurry back to Belton, and prepare the way with the Earl to receive a son-in-law who had neither rank nor fortune to offer in exchange for his lovely daughter.

He would try to dazzle his eyes with the prospect of an ambassadorship in the future. It scarcely seemed probable from the common-sense point of view, but at least it was possible, and a bare possibility was quite enough to go on. Carried away by his unselfish desire for Valerie's happiness at any cost, he longed to be able to share the immense rent-roll of Belton with the young diplomatist, but he knew that Verreker in his proud independence would never stoop to receive such a service from a friend.

"Daintree, how can I ever thank you for all you have done for me!" said Rex, stretching out a thin hand.

"By making a good husband to Valerie de Montfort," said the Marquis, hurriedly, as he grasped Verreker's hand in an honest grip. Rex turned deathly pale, for his weakness made him as impressionable as a girl, and stared.

"I shall never be that," he said, slowly.

"You don't like her well enough," looking out of the window.

"No, not half enough," with bitterest sarcasm.

"Nonsense, I know all about it," with fierce impatience, because of the pain it gave him to talk of it; "and if you are going to spoil her life

because of your beggarly pride, I tell you, you have no right to do it."

"The Earl would laugh in my face."

"He would do nothing of the kind. He is a sensible man, and fond of his daughter."

"And everyone else would call me a fortune-hunter," with a sigh.

"They might if they were bursting with envy, but I suppose you've too much sense to care about that!"

"Good Heavens!" breaking out involuntarily, as his heart swelled with the intensity of his love; "do you think I should care for anything if I only had her?"

It was like a cry of pain, and the moment that the words had passed his lips he was sorry that he had uttered them. He lay back on his pillow with a feverish flush on his cheeks, an excited glitter in his eyes, and Dr. Jones, who walked in a few minutes later, peremptorily banished the Marquis from the room, administered a cooling draught, drew down the blinds, and ordered the patient to go to sleep.

"You've been talking to him," he said to the Marquis, gruffly.

"Of course I have—a man must use his tongue."

"I should have thought a man must use his brains as well," drily.

"Now don't be disagreeable," with a good-natured smile. "You know you couldn't have got on without me."

"I could, but I don't know about Verreker. I should have put in a competent nurse, ordered the right remedies, and there my responsibility would have ended. I have a dozen calls to make in the space of two hours, and I suppose you are going to waste them in making pretty speeches, till every girl in Vienna will think she has a chance of being a marchioness."

"You are wrong, completely wrong," with a hearty laugh, as they emerged on to the pavement. "I am going into one of the filthiest slums in the town on important business."

"There's a woman in the background," said the doctor, slyly.

"In the foreground, with three dirty little brats into the bargain—a woman whose face, the last time I saw it, hadn't been near a drop of water for a fortnight."

"This doesn't sound like your game. If there's a dirty face in front there's a pretty one behind, and the owner of it is pulling the strings. I wouldn't mind wagering half my income."

He did not wait for an answer, but, raising his hat, jumped into his carriage and drove off, casting a mischievous glance at Lord Daintree as he went.

The latter stood looking after him with a thoughtful smile, then beckoned to the coachman of a light phaeton which he had hired for a few weeks. There was a pretty woman at the bottom of it, and he was thinking of her as he gathered up the reins, and subsequently drove at a rapid rate through the crowded streets.

Only the other day he had found Marie de Ruigny almost in tears because her father had forbidden her to pay another visit to the house where Zebedee Sleeman had lodged, or to carry out her charitable plans for his *ex-dévant* landlady's welfare.

With his usual good nature he had immediately turned over the matter in his mind to see if he could be of any service, and the consequence was that he soon after appeared at the Comte de Ruigny's with a petition.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A FAIRY-HOME.

COUNTRESS MARIE DE RUIGNY could scarcely refrain from bursting out laughing when the Marquis of Daintree, with a very grave face, announced that he had come to ask the services of one of the ladies in the house with regard to a little matter he had in hand.

"A friend of mine has just taken a house for a woman in whom he is interested, and he hasn't an idea how to furnish it. I wondered if you

would mind helping me!" looking full at the young Countess.

"Oh! Marie is such a little fidget that she will be glad to have something to do," said her father, with a smile. "Work her to death, and then perhaps she will give us a little peace at home."

Her mother said the same, for all the new dresses had been tried on that her daughter was to take with her to England; and she was glad that anyone should give her some employment to keep her out of mischief till she was well on her way.

Thus it came to pass that, in company with a very stiff chaperon, the Countess Marie and Lord Dalntree were thrown very much together. The little house in a respectable part of the town was a constant amusement to them, and they laughed over it like two children with a toy.

"Who can this friend be who has taken this dear little place?"

"The only person who has a thorough appreciation of my virtues," said the Marquis gravely.

"I suppose it isn't yourself!" with a mischievous smile under which she often hid an aching heart.

"Your rudeness surprises me."

"It wouldn't if you knew me better. But do you know I am puzzling how that poor Frau Schmidt will ever be able to pay the rent."

It was a charming little white house with green shutters, a door and small passage in the centre, with a kitchen on one side, a parlour on the other, and three bedrooms at the top of a flight of stairs. The Countess Marie, who knew very little about that sort of thing, had provided a complete set of kitchen utensils, besides tea-cups, plates, and dishes; for she said it would never do for Frau Schmidt to arrive without a kettle to boil the water for tea, or a cup to drink out of. Homely furniture had also been chosen for the parlour and the bedrooms, and the Marquis had even bought a few pictures to give the place a home-like air, which he was now nailing up with great diligence. He looked over his shoulder in answer to the last remark, "There will be no rent—I bought it."

Marie dropped the packet of nails which she was holding for his benefit, the colour, in her glad surprise, rushed into her face, and her eyes shone.

"Oh, Miller! that is too good of you. But it must have cost a fortune!"

"A mere trifle," hammering away with great vigour. "You told me she saved Verreker's life, so she deserved something."

"You pretended it was a friend—will you let me thank you?" holding out her hand.

He looked down on it with a smile, then took it in his large one, and shook it with hearty friendliness. "It was only a piece of selfishness on my part; I wanted something to do, and this has saved me from cutting my throat."

"I wish more of your English noblemen would want something to do. There would be no poverty left in your enormous London," her heart swelling with admiration for the kind and simple high-bred gentleman who, without any fuss or parade, probably did as much good by his own unassisted efforts as half the philanthropical societies in the world.

The chaperon sat, knitting in hand, on a sofa, which the Marquis had insisted upon getting, because every woman, whether rich or poor, was sure to have a headache tolerably often and want to lie down; and as she sat she wondered at the amount of pleasure which the young Countess and the English lord contrived to throw into their work. Certainly different people had different tastes; but for her part she would be exceedingly relieved to find herself once more in the beautifully furnished home of the de Ravigny, and out of this poky cottage.

Actually there was Marie arranging the mat in front of the fireplace with her own white hands! And now she was dusting the table with one of the new dusters that she had made her sisters hem the evening before!

Marie de Ravigny's tongue was in the habit of going as fast as her fingers; and now she seasoned her humble occupations with a good

deal of talk; but she took great care to speak English, perhaps because the chaperon did not understand a word of it. "This Sleeman must be a very clever man," unfolding a bright-coloured cloth, to throw over the table; "he could bring a cat back to life, and creep through a key-hole."

"The cat never was dead, and bribery opened the door of his prison; nothing wonderful in that. The Socialists always stand by one another!"

"But how did you know he was a Socialist?"

"I didn't; but I wanted him taken up; and as it turned out, I hit the right mark by mistake. Don't look shocked; he tried to murder Verreker in England, and here he stole from him something that he valued more than his life, so you needn't pity him."

"Pity him, no! But is the murderer to go scot free?" opening her eyes wide with horror.

"It seems so. He is as slippery as an eel, and wriggles through the hands of the police. But I don't mind him so much as his master, Colonel Darrell. He is the head which plans all the wickedness, and this man is the tool that carries it out. Listen, Countess, he is trying to get Lady Valerie into his toils by some pretended cheating dodge of mesmerism, but I trust to you whilst you are staying at Baudesert to prevent him."

"But what could I do?" awed by the indefinite task thus quietly set before her.

"Everything. You won't be taken in by the wretch; you will have common sense enough not to be frightened at his mysterious ways. You will hate the servant so much that you will have some dislike to spare for the master, and, best of all, you will be on your guard."

"You almost frighten me," her heart beating with natural excitement.

"Not likely; you wouldn't be a de Ravigny if you were a coward. There is another danger which you will understand better. A girl named Miss Springgold is jealous of Lady Valerie, and has spread all sorts of stories about her, simply out of spite because she wanted to have Verreker for herself."—Marie winced. "Lady Valerie is spotless as an angel, but—but," hesitating, "she has no worldly wisdom, and seems to have done imprudent things—you must stand up for her, and see that the other doesn't tease her."

"And pray what is to be my reward for all these arduous undertakings?" lifting her head with rather a scornful air, as if she were not much inclined to put herself out for a Valerie de Montfort.

"I shall think you the best girl that ever lived," said the Marquis, warmly.

"Almost as good as Lady Valerie!" looking up into his earnest face.

"You could not do me a greater service than to help her," he said, simply.

"Oh, indeed! Then, of course, I must be ready to do anything on earth for her!"

"I didn't mean that. When you have once seen her you will want no inducement."

"Don't say anything more, or I shall hate her," she exclaimed, with great vivacity.

The Marquis stared. In his simple way he could not imagine why she looked so cross.

"Have I offended you?" he said, anxiously.

"Oh, dear no!" But it is quite time to be going home," and home she went in the family barouche, and only extended the tips of her fingers to the Marquis in parting.

The next day her ill-humour had quite vanished, and she looked about anxiously for her trusty friend, as she drove up to the door of Frau Schmidt's future home. He was not there, and he had not come by the time that Frau Schmidt herself arrived with all her belongings in a cart. The children looked as neat as possible in spite of their shabby garments, and every face looked as if it had been thoroughly scrubbed with English yellow soap. Bertha, Rose, and Franz, after their first shyness was over, rushed about the little house in the wildest state of excitement.

A bright fire burned both in the kitchen and the parlour, and there was a nice stock of coals in the cellar. The tea was laid in the parlour, and Marie poured it out, for Frau Schmidt seemed quite dazed with happiness.

Every now and then anxious eyes strayed to the door. Marie wondered and fidgeted about the cause of Lord Dalntree's absence, not knowing that the average Englishman, however willing he may be to do a kindness, has generally a horror of being thanked.

Somehow the day had not been such a success as she had expected, although the widow's gratitude and joy had both been boundless. She made Frau Schmidt to understand that the children must be sent to school, and told her that if she could sew neatly with her needle her mother, the Countess de Ravigny, would engage to supply her with sufficient work to keep the small household going.

Bertha Schmidt was delighted at this, because she had an independent spirit which did not lend itself willingly to being supported out of charity. She went to bed that night, unable to believe that she would not wake the next day to find herself back in that miserable street, and her new home gone away to fairyland; but, in the morning her eyes travelled with delight over the pretty paper and neat furniture of her bedroom, and she prayed that she might show her gratitude for all the many mercies that had been shown her, by leading an honest, contented, industrious life, and bringing up her children to be a blessing to herself and others.

Marie de Ravigny had gone home, to be teased by all the party about her new *protégée*, but the good-natured chaff ceased when the Marquis appeared with a graver expression than usual, and explained that he was suddenly summoned to England by important business that would not wait, and he was going to start the next morning. Verreker insisted upon accompanying him, and he only wished to know if the Countess Marie would care for their escort.

"Yes, she did care very much," she said, eagerly, as she hated the thought of the long journey alone with her maid, and she must run away immediately to prepare.

"I may trust you to take every care of her!" said the Countess, earnestly. "And you won't mind her maid being in the same carriage?"

"Not at all; or her man as well, if you prefer it."

CHAPTER XXXVII

A FAITHFUL SERVANT.

It was the dead of night, and Colonel Darrell was sitting alone in his lodgings in Paris, sorting papers and tearing up those that did not require to be kept, when a low tap came at the door, followed by two others in rapid succession.

"Come in," he called out hastily, looking up with a certain expectancy in his dark eyes, because he recognised the peculiar signal.

A small form, robed in the dress of a mendicant friar, crept softly into the room; but as the cowl fell back from the bent head Colonel Darrell saw, as he knew he would, the ugly features of Zebedee Sleeman.

"So you are here!" with raised eyebrows; "I never gave you orders to leave Vienna!"

"No, and I didn't need to wait for them, or else you would have had to do all the rest yourself," with a significant glance.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I was trapped by the police, and I didn't think you would care to see me put into either witness-box or dock; so I got away with the help of a fellow to whom I gave a large sum of money."

"But how were you such a fool as to let yourself be caught?" inquired Darrell, with fierce impatience, for the mere mention of the police reminded him of a tragedy in the past.

Zebedee rubbed his shaggy head.

"I think the devil was in it. I made sure everything was safe and went out, leaving the papers in Afra's care; and on my way to the telegraph office I was stopped by a fellow named Hirsch, who was evidently put up to do the job by Verreker, for as soon as I got away from the first I came upon him dressed like a common workman."

An exclamation of surprise escaped from Darrell.

"He held me till the police came up and took me; so I owe him something for that. What beats me is, that there wasn't a word of the despatches, but they charged me with being a Socialist!"

Colonel Darrell opened his eyes. The charge did not scare him, as it might most other people; although he knew that he was very likely compromised by some of the papers found in his servant's pockets; but he questioned Zebedee eagerly about the lost papers. Sleeman knew no more about their final resting-place than his master, for he was not aware of Verreker's second visit to his room. He guessed that his vengeance had gone home, in the first instance, for he had seen him stalk by that very afternoon, looking like a ghost. He gathered that he was very ill from a blow received in the disturbance which was raised by the sympathisers in his own misfortune; but whether he were in disgrace or not he could not tell.

"But I can," said Darrell, irritably; "the fellow has been saved by some stupid mistake of yours again. This is the third time you've failed. The first, when you or the lightning nearly did for him on the night of the storm. The second, when you stole the wrong papers which were never missed and never wanted; and this third time, when you began better, but ended miserably, as usual."

This was all the reward he got for his patient plodding through the ways of vice, for his sleepless nights and anxious days—for all the thousand miseries he had endured for a master who never thanked him!

Yet Zebedee was drawn towards Louis Darrell by a feeling that was beyond affection, and on the verge of adoration. One grateful look would have been sufficient guerdon for a service which had narrowly missed costing him his life or his liberty, but he did not get it.

Colonel Darrell never forgot to pay an injury; but a willing tool might work for ever, to be thrown away into obscurity when no longer of any use.

There was a long pause, whilst Zebedee rubbed the arm which he had broken some time before in an attempt to scale a window at the British Embassy, and Darrell was thinking of some other scheme by which to baffle Verreker in the end.

"There is a girl who hates Valerie," it flashed across him like a whisper from the evil one himself; "something might be made out of her. You can go now," to Zebedee, "and don't come near me again so long as you are in Paris. I shall wait you in England, but not here. Since you were fool enough to let yourself be searched we must never be seen together."

"How could I help it?" in a sullen tone, his heart rising in sudden indignation. "I wish I had died, that I do!"

"It might have been better," said Darrell, coldly.

A tool, according to his creed, was never to fail, always to work, and, above all, to succeed. Without a word, Zebedee turned to leave the room.

Darrell let his eye run down to the bottom of the paper he was reading, and then called out,—

"Have you any money?"

"No," without turning round, as he stood, a small black figure facing the door.

"Then why didn't you ask for some?" unlocking a drawer. He counted out a certain amount of bank-notes, and a small heap of gold, then pushed the money across the table.

"Look here, Sleeman, don't turn rusty, or 'pon my soul, I'll give you up. If you expect praise when you've failed most abominably you won't get it. Do you want me to look out for another servant?"

His dark eyes fixed themselves with a hard, questioning stare on Zebedee's clouded face. It seemed to penetrate to the very core of his heart, till he shrank as if in pain, and shivered.

"Don't talk like that, or I'll go mad!"

"Then behave yourself for the future," sternly, as if he were a nigger-driver discoursing with a

slave. "I warn you, if you fail next time you and I must part!"

"You know if I could choose," he answered, meekly, in a voice that shook, but not with fear, "I'd rather die than not do the work you give me!"

"Then succeed," and Colonel Darrell, accustomed to military brevity, gave a little nod of dismissal.

Sleeman slunk out of the room with the air of a coward, afraid to look any man in the face, when, in reality, in his mis-shaped form there was a brave, undaunted spirit, ready to do or dare anything in the service of his master. In other hands he might have led a useful, honourable life, for he was capable of a patient, plodding industry which would have wearied many toilers; but in Colonel Darrell's service he was trained to evil with sedulous care; scoffed at if he shrank from sin, praised if he plunged into crime without a shudder, till now his conscience was successfully stifled, and never gave him any trouble. He could sleep like a child, though a murder was to be committed by his hands before the dawn; he could see a man die, and contemplate his own end without blinking!

He hurried to his lodgings like a rat to its hole, and, striking a match, lighted a candle, and looked round with eager eyes. There was a movement in the corner of the room; Afra unwound herself from the folds of an old coat on which she had been lying, and, with a joyful bound, crossed the small patch of carpet, and sprang upon his shoulder. There she sat rubbing her whiskers softly against his pallid cheek, and purring as if to show her pleasure in seeing him again; and the hard face softened, the sullen look went out of the dull grey eyes, and the lips which were prone to cursing uttered a soft caress.—

"My pretty one! She cares for me, don't she? It wasn't her fault that those papers were lost, I know. They would have looked in a cupboard, or a drawer, but no one would think of upsetting a cat in order to find what was under her. They nearly killed her out of spite, but I don't know how it happened; and I should like to wring the fellow's neck who laid a hand on my beauty. We'll go off the hooks together, some day, for there will be nobody to give you anything but kicks and blows when I'm out of the way, and I couldn't bear the world without my little comfort."

The cat seemed to listen with an air of pleasure and licked his face in sign of gratitude.

Perhaps he liked the attentions of his cat's tongue better than most, for he could not remember when he had been kissed by the lips of man or woman, boy or girl.

His favourite was no longer white, for he had dyed her black in order not to attract the suspicious eyes of the police, and in some inscrutable manner induced her to give up the feline habit of licking her own coat, so that she remained black, at least for a season.

He heard nothing from his master for some time, but at last he received a message to proceed at once to England. He did not know whether the police were still on the look-out for him or no; he had reason to suppose that his first step on the pier at Dover might also be the first step to a cell at Dartmoor, and yet it never occurred to his peculiar mind to hesitate.

Colonel Darrell told him to go, so he went, taking Afra with him.

Unmolested he got into the train at Dover, disguised as a sailor, and late in the evening he proceeded on foot through the forest, taking an unfrequented path lest he should be recognised on the way.

A little black pig, running wild in the mud and slush, looked at him inquiringly to see if this two-footed animal meant to disturb him; but finding that the stranger seemed bent on pursuing his way without attention to anything else, he went on grubbing contentedly amongst the roots, before the sound of his footsteps was out of his ears.

The forest had a weird, desolate look, with distances of mysterious shadows, where there was no sound except the continual dripping from the leafless branches.

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It is said that the peasant of the South of France spends on food for a family of five an average of twopence a day.

THE Canadians have a device by which they can mount guns on snow-sleighs, and so convey them silently and swiftly in these novel gun-carriages to the desired point of action, when wintry roads make wheel-traffic impossible.

Zabedee Sleeman was footsore and very weary, but he trudged on without stopping a moment to rest, with his pack on his back, and his large feet sloping deep in the mud.

Dully, as it did not interest him much, he wondered what work was awaiting him in the old home of the Darrells.

Perhaps the girl with the large, frightened eyes was to be trapped, and brought into the snare.

How scared she looked that day when he gave her his master's letter in the garden!

He could almost have found it in his heart to pity her, only he had no pity left but for himself and Afra.

Whatever he had to do he should do it without caring a straw whether it injured anyone or not. That was not his look-out, but his master's, and with a groan of relief he opened the iron gate which led into the garden, and looked up with the flicker of a smile at the grey walls of Ivora Keep rising mistily out of the shadows.

This was the only place on earth which the hunchback regarded as home.

(To be continued)

FAÇETIÆ.

DAUGHTER: "What is the dead-letter office, mamma?" Mamma: "Your father's pocket."

LARRY: "Be hiving, Dinny! That could his be atin' atiray tacks." Dinny: "Maybe she is goin' to lay a carpet. Who knows?"

SHE: "Yes, she is a woman who has suffered a great deal because of her belief." He: "Indeed! And what is her belief?" She: "That she can wear No. 8 shoe on a No. 6 foot."

FREDDIE: "Dad, why do so many people put their valuables under their pillows when they go to sleep?" Cobwigger: "I suppose it's because they like to have a little money to fall back on."

JIM: "I wouldn't be guilty of making a joke about my mother-in-law." Steve: "Nor I. I don't believe in trifling with the serious things of life."

"We dealt with the same milkman for ten years." "Why did you change?" "We found out the new man had a filter attached to his pump!"

TAPELEY: "You're an orphan!" Miss Somergirl: "Yes." Tapeley: "Well, whose consent may I ask in order to marry you?" Miss Somergirl: "Well, you might ask mine."

LITTLE DICK: "Why do all these dreammakers have big signs sayin' they is modest?" Little Dot: "I dese they want folks to know it isn't their fault the dresses is cut so low."

THEATRE MANAGER: "Cut out all those old jokes." Actor: "Y—yes, sir." Manager: "And put in some older ones. The public like a change once in a while."

BESS: "So Jeannette married a farmer. I thought she said she would marry only a man of culture!" Nell: "And so she did—a man of agriculture."

SHE: "It's strange that the littlest things in life offer the greatest difficulties!" He: "That's so! Last night, for instance, I could find the house all right, but for the life of me I couldn't find the keyhole!"

"Did you ever notice that almost all these misers reported in the papers are single men?" asked Mr. Watts. "Yes," answered Mrs. Watts, "married misers are too common to be worth mentioning."

MISS GUSHINGTON: "Oh, papa, do you remember the meaning of different names? Now, William means good. I wonder what Arthur means!" Papa (severely): "I hope Arthur means business, Matilda."

CLERGYMAN: "My child, beware of picking a toadstool instead of a mushroom. They are easy to confuse." Child: "That be all roight, sur. Us bain't agoin' to eat 'em ourselves—they're agoin' to market to be sold."

JANE: "That Mr. Shallopate is at the door. Shall I tell him you are engaged?" Miss Pinkie: "Show him into the parlour, Jane." "Yes'm."

"And, Jane, after he lays his box of candy on the mantelpiece, tell him I am out."

BING: "Yes, that's old Spriggins. Half a dozen doctors have given him up at various times during his life." Wing: "What was the trouble with him?" Bing: "He wouldn't pay his doctors' bills."

"Pa," said Willie, "won't you double my pocket-money?" "Why should I, sonny?" "Oh, I thought if it was bigger it would weigh more on your mind, and you might remember to give it to me sometimes."

MAMMA: "I shall tell your father to-night when he comes home. You've been fighting again!" Bobby: "Please don't tell him, mamma. I'm licked bad enough now, without having another scrap with papa!"

BOBBY: "What are descendants, father?" Father: "Why, the people who come after you." (Presently): "Who is that young man in the passage?" Bobby: "That's one of sister's descendants come to take her for a drive!"

"I THINK," said the ingenious man, "that I have an invention at last which will make my fortune." "What is it?" "It is a camera for use in fishing camps. It exaggerates the size of the fish while taking the fisherman at his normal size."

"Was the dear girl happily married?" asked she friend. "Yes, indeed," answered Miss McGabble. "It was one of the happiest weddings I ever saw. I never saw so few duplicates among the presents of cut glass and silverware."

"YES," said the bachelor, reflectively, "I offended her in some way, but I don't really know how. You see, her baby was fretful, and she explained that he had been cutting his teeth; whereupon I asked her why she let him play with a knife."

"If you will get my new suit done by Saturday," said a customer to a tailor, "I'll be for ever indebted to you." "If that's your game," replied the tailor, "the clothes will not be done at all."

JENKS: "Doctor, I have a frequent and intense desire to kiss young and beautiful girls. Do you think I ought to get married?" His Doctor: "No; under those circumstances you'd better not get married."

SHE: "I can't see why the doctors all recommend bicycle-riding! If it makes people healthier, it must mean a loss to the doctors!" He: "Perhaps; but they estimate that one sound rider will disable five pedestrians a week."

"WHY are you so sure he is in love with you?" "He remained thirty minutes on his knees on the ice with his gloves off putting on a pair of skates that other men have put on for me in less than three minutes."

TOM: "So you loved and lost, did you?" Jack: "On the contrary, I came out a winner." Tom: "How's that? Didn't you just tell me she married another?" Jack: "Yes, but she returned all my presents, and accidentally put in some of the other fellow's."

MRS. SUBURB (joyously): "My dear, I've succeeded in getting a servant-girl at last. Go to the kitchen and kiss her." Mr. Suburb: "Kiss her?" Mrs. Suburb: "Certainly. I had to promise that she should be treated as one of the family."

"It takes some time for folks to be appreciated," said Mrs. Cornetson. "There ain't any doubt in my mind that Joslar is a very gifted young man." "Yes," answered her husband, "bout everything he has had, so far, in life has been given to him."

MRS. BLANK: "Ah, Jim, our—" Mr. Blank: "Oh Mary! the news is—" "Why, who told you?" "I saw it in the paper; the bank has—" "The bank! Why, what has that to do with—" "Why, you know the panic will—" "Who's talking about panics! Who cares for panics! Baby's cut a tooth."

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SOCIETY.

PRINCE AND PRINCESS CHARLES OF DENMARK are expected to arrive at Copenhagen early in April, by which time the Princess of Wales and Princess Victoria will have gone there on a visit to the King of Denmark.

THE Queen will herself hold one of the May Drawing Rooms at Buckingham Palace after the return of the Court from the Continent, and Her Majesty will then receive the Corps Diplomatique, all the members of which will be expected to attend.

HER MAJESTY has made a collection of the photographs of every officer killed in South Africa. It is a sad album, and yet one of which the Queen is doubtless proud. Many inquiries are made as to the widows and orphans.

THE Duchess of York with the Duke will come to town in May; but the Duchess, in consequence of her mourning, will not be out much. The Duke will, however, fulfil many public engagements.

THE Duke and Duchess of Connaught are to come over from Dublin in May, in order that they may be present at the Queen's own Drawing Room, which will be a function of special interest to them, as their elder daughter, Princess Margaret, will on that occasion join the Royal circle in the Throne Room for the first time.

A MARRIAGE has been arranged between Prince Rupert of Bavaria, grandson of the Prince Regent Leopold, and ultimate heir to the throne, and the Archduchess Anna of Hapsburg-Lorraine, second daughter of the Grand Duke of Tuscany. A sister of the Archduchess Anna was married a few years ago to Prince Frederick Augustus, nephew of King Albert, and heir to the throne of Saxony. Prince Rupert, who is in his thirty-first year, has travelled extensively all over Europe and in the East.

THE young Queen of Holland is showing herself to be very energetic and desirous of making full acquaintance with affairs of State. She rises daily at seven, and the morning and part of the afternoon are occupied with official business, with the exception of time allowed for a ride before luncheon. Though there are constantly reports of her immediate engagement it appears that she has not decided who is to share her heart and throne.

THE Queen who is already the possessor of the Bible which accompanied General Gordon through his campaign in China, has, it is stated, received the Koran of the Mahdi, who was responsible for the gallant soldier's death. It is believed that among her most treasured relics at Windsor Castle Her Majesty has also the autograph letter which Gordon wrote to the Mahdi in answer to the demand for retreat or surrender, and which is said to have been picked up by a private soldier in one of the streets of Omdurman soon after the entry of the British troops.

It is rumoured at the Court of St. Petersburg that the recent visit of the Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha and the great entertainment given by the Tsar in his honour, had reference to the betrothal of the Tsarevitch and the Princess Beatrice, his cousin. The former was twenty-one in December, and the latter, who was born at Eastwell Park, will be sixteen on April 20th. Both are handsome, and no match could indeed be more suitable for either. In the Princess the Russians would have one who is practically of their own Imperial family, daughter of the Grand Duchess Marie Alexandrovna, and a niece of Tsar Alexander the Third. Moreover, she is the sister of the future Queen of Roumania and the reigning Grand Duchess of Hesse, besides being a granddaughter of Queen Victoria, and a cousin of the German Kaiser. From a religious point of view too, the alliance would be favourable, as the Princess's mother is a Greek Catholic, like all her Russian, Roumanian, and Greek relations. The Duchess and her daughter are shortly expected at St. Petersburg for their annual spring visit.

STATISTICS.

THERE are 4,500 women printers in England. THE Tartarian alphabet contains 202 letters, being the longest in the world.

THE public buildings of England are valued at £240,000,000.

BEFORE the war the population of the Transvaal was estimated at 750,000, of whom only 150,000 were whites. The latter included 87,000 Uitlanders, 80 per cent. of whom were British subjects.

GEMS.

ALL great natures delight in stability; all great men find sterility affirmed in the very promise of their faculties.

Few persons have sufficient wisdom to prefer censure which is useful to praise which deceives them.

THE mind requires not, like an earthen vessel, to be kept full; convenient food ailments only will influence it with a desire of knowledge and an ardent love of truth.

TRUE independence never merges into isolation, but gladly welcomes every aid from every source—not in servile and indolent subjection, but as the growing plant welcomes the warm sun and the refreshing rain by which it is to gain in strength, in beauty, and in fruitfulness.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CHOCOLATE KISSES.—Mix thoroughly two ounces of grated chocolate with one pound of castor sugar; beat well the whites of three eggs, and stir them into the chocolate and sugar. Drop the mixture from a spoon on to buttered paper in the shape of an egg. Bake in a slow oven. When ready, remove them, scoop out a little that may be moist; then fill the space with jam, jelly or candied fruits. Stick two of these together with a little beaten white of egg, and put away in tin boxes.

FRASE MEAL SCONES.—Half-pound pease meal, half-pound of wheaten meal, three-quarter teaspoonful of baking powder, one and a-half teaspoonful of cream of tartar, half-teaspoonful of salt, one dessertspoonful of treacle, buttermilk. Mix carefully all the dry things, mix the treacle and buttermilk together, and stir in as much as makes a soft dough; knead it out half-inch thick, and cook on a griddle or in the oven till ready; the scones, if you put on the griddle, should have flour rubbed over them first.

BREAD AND JAM FRITTERS.—Sieve together quarter of a pound of flour and a pinch of salt; make a hole in the middle and break in an egg. Mix smoothly, adding gradually quarter of a pint of milk. Beat this batter well and let it stand. Cut about four thin slices of bread and make them into jam sandwiches—cut them in small diamond-shaped pieces. Dip each in the batter and drop them into the boiling fat; fry a pretty brown; then drain them well on kitchen paper. Sprinkle with castor sugar, and they are ready to serve.

LEMON CURD.—There are numerous methods of making this delicious mixture. This one is excellent, and will keep for years: Melt four ounces of good fresh butter in a clean enamel stewpan. Then put in half a pound of castor sugar, the grated rind and strained juice of three lemons, and three sponge fingers (a halfpenny each) made into crumbs by grating or sieving. Then beat together slightly in a basin four whole eggs and two extra yolks. Strain these into the stewpan, and stir all over a slow fire till the ingredients thicken and resemble honey. Do not let it boil. Pour into clean, dry pots. Tie down, and keep in a cool, dry storeroom.

MISCELLANEOUS.

If a Chinaman dies while being tried for murder the very fact of his dying is taken as evidence of his guilt. He has departed, but somebody must suffer; and his eldest son, if he has one, is sent to prison for a year.

It is possible to see a greater stretch of surrounding scenery from the top of Letch Hill, Surrey, than from any other spot in England. Parts of ten, and with a telescope eleven, counties can be seen from the summit.

THE comparative durability of iron and aluminium horseshoes has been tested in the cavalry of Finland. The shoes were worn for six weeks, and in every case the aluminium shoe was in better condition than the others.

THE Zulus carry their wounded to the hills and expose their wounds to the air, having found by experience that that is the quickest way of curing them. There is in London some sort of hospital for the treatment of wounds by cauter, founded upon this very Zulu practice.

A PAPER bicycle has now invaded the field. Paper fibre, similar to that sometimes used in the manufacture of railway carriage wheels, is employed for tubing, and is as strong as any in use. A factory is said to be contemplated for the production of bicycles of this sort.

AMONG the Siamese the curious custom obtains of reversing the elbow joint of the left arm as a sign of superiority. The children of both sexes are trained to keep their elbow in this painful position at an early age if their parents are persons of high grades.

ELECTRIC insects have been reported. A noted hunter makes the statement that upon taking up a large caterpillar in the forests of South America, he received so powerful a shock that his right arm and side were almost paralysed, and even his life jeopardised.

HERBETOPE perfumery has been detached from flowers by soaking them in lard. A Parisian has now found a way of gathering the fragrances by simply soaking the flowers in water, a process which can be repeated several times without destroying the flowers.

It is a curious fact that the roots and branches of a tree are so alike in their nature that if a tree be uprooted and turned upside down, the underground branches will take to themselves the functions of roots, and the exposed roots will in time bud and become veritable branches.

THE lighthouse on Arnish Rock, in the Hebrides, is about 500 ft. from the shore. To avoid having an attendant on the rock, the light is produced on the shore and projected across the water upon a mirror in the lighthouse, the mirror reflecting the light in the desired direction.

NEAR the Bermudas the sea is extremely transparent, so that the fishermen can readily see the horns of the lobsters protruding from their hiding-places in the rocks at a considerable depth. To entice the crustaceans from their crannies, they tie a lot of snails in a ball, and dangle them in front of the cautious lobster.

AFTER the period of walking and canoeing had its day in colonial times, nearly all land travel, for a century, was on horseback, just as it was in England at that date. In 1672, there were only six stage coaches in the whole of Great Britain, and a man wrote a pamphlet protesting that they encouraged too much travel. Boston then had one private coach. Women and children usually rode seated on a pillion behind a man. One way of progress which would help four persons ride part of their journey was what was called the "ride-and-tie" system. Two of the four persons who were travelling started on their route on foot; two, mounted on the saddle and pillion, rode about a mile, dismounted, tied the horse, and walked on. When the two who had started on foot reached the waiting horse they mounted, rode on past the other couple for a mile, dismounted, tied and walked on; and so on.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ALL.—Reading is in Berkshire.

JANEY.—Tight lacing is always injurious.

GEORGE.—A baronetcy ranks before a knighthood.

A. J.—Woodwich Arsenal belongs to the Government.

TERENCE.—The Spanish-American war broke out and closed in 1898.

A. K.—The landlady is not bound to accept payment by instalments.

IGNORANT.—"Aut vincere aut mori"—that is "Either to conquer or die."

PRUDENCE.—Constant use of the tweezers is the only safe way of proceeding.

CLARENCE.—Lemon and orange peelings, well dried, will instantly revive a dying fire.

G. B. D.—The height of Spion Kop is given as 7,609 feet. Snowdon is 9,571 feet high.

K. K.—The area of England is 51,000 square miles; that of the Transvaal 119,200 square miles.

H. G.—The name Tegels is, we believe, pronounced with the "g" hard, and in three syllables.

TROUBLED.—Your best course would be to apply to the magistrates for further time for payment.

N. O.—The man is British, and would be accepted unless he had become a naturalised American.

E. L.—Every legacy is now liable to duty unless the smallness of the total estate makes it exempt.

TEDDY.—Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, M.P., entered the Cabinet in 1886 as President of the Board of Trade.

ANXIOUS.—It would, of course, be legal to marry an "adopted daughter," provided she was no relation.

BETTY.—An agreement entered into by a minor without the consent of his parents cannot be enforced.

SALLIE.—A birth-mark cannot be removed without leaving a more disfiguring scar than the original mark.

EMILY.—Onions, before being cooked or added to any dish, should be boiled ten minutes and the water thrown away.

V. R.—Any of the law stations of Chancery-lane could show you some second-hand books at various prices.

OLD READER.—Go to a magistrate and state your case. He may send an officer of the court to enable you to get it.

BERT.—A gun is silenced when the gunners are disabled or driven back and the gun or gun-carriage damaged.

MOTHER-IN-LAW.—It is quite legal for a wife to insure a husband's life in her own interest without his knowledge or consent.

GERARD.—The effect of thawing snow by the use of salt creates a mephitic which is injurious by reason of its extreme coldness.

MAY.—Clear boiling water will remove tea-stains; pour the water through the stain, and thus prevent its spreading over the fabric.

WINCHESTER.—Winchester was the capital of England in the time of King Alfred. Several of the kings lived there, and many Parliaments have been held there.

FANNIE.—Ink-stains may be removed by applying spirits of salt until the spot disappears, and at once wash the part well with cold water to remove the spirits of salt.

E. P.—We believe that a soldier's pay accumulates during his detention as a prisoner of war, but he would have to prove his claim to the satisfaction of a court-martial.

MILLY.—First wash in weak tea, rinsing afterwards in a second lot. Then wring out, lay out between two pieces of black material, and iron with a moderately hot flat-iron till dry.

HENRIETTA.—Yes, it is very unhealthy to keep flowers in the room you sleep in. Even if they are fresh every day, they should be put out of the room during the night.

M. C.—A foreigner must take out certificates of naturalisation before he is entitled to a Parliamentary vote; this he can do after five years' residence in the United Kingdom.

Y. N.—Spoons should never be used for measuring medicine, as they vary greatly in capacity. A graduated measure glass is the proper thing, and this should always be rinsed immediately after.

A. R.—The whole business seems to be very complicated, and we are quite at a loss to know on what point you wish our advice. It appears to be a family matter, and as such should be settled by the family.

M. R.—We should advise you writing again about it; but if that fails to bring them, get your father or brother to call, and refuse to leave the house without them. He has no right whatever to keep them without your sanction.

CONSTANT READER.—If you complain of want of ventilation in your bedroom, you should remove one of the upper panes of glass of the window, and substitute a pane of perforated zinc. It is the cheapest and best form of ventilation.

THEATRICAL.—You can always find out anything of that sort by reference to one of the theatrical papers. A list of most of the touring companies is always given in the theatrical papers, with the towns they are in for the current week, and the towns they visit the following week.

POLITICS.—Queen Victoria is not the servant of either Cabinet or nation; she reigns in right of blood descent, and is one of the heads of the nation, Parliament being another; if she desired to abdicate, her intention must be indicated by word of mouth to her Ministers, and by them conveyed to Parliament.

WORRIED FOLLIE.—If you judge his devotion and tenderness merely by the words he uses to you, and not by his actions, which we gather are all that could be trusted, we can only say you are very foolish. The truest lovers are often those who can least give vent in words to what they feel in their hearts.

FEST.—Renew the plaster in which they lurk for most part, and go over all woodwork with a mixture of about one-third carbolic acid and two-thirds water; see that this is run into all cracks, holes, and crevices; it is strong enough to destroy both insects and eggs; keep hands out of it.

NELL.—If you eat plenty of fattening foods, including butter, cream, cocoa, sugar, or syrup, rich mutton, fresh bacon, carrots and lentil soups, and have extract of malt to aid digestion, avoid fatigue, and yet without do not fatten, let it be understood you are of the slendery rather than the fattening kind.

ANNETTE.—Lace can be washed in milk, tinted with a little tea or coffee. Put a little sugar or gum, instead of starch. Roll them on a bottle to dry. Pick them out carefully with your finger nails, and iron between two folds of muslin. Black lace can be washed in beer or stout.

KATE.—Put one pint of cold water in an enamelled saucepan. Add one pound of lean mutton cut in small pieces; heat slowly, and simmer gently (not boil) for two hours, skimming occasionally. Strain, flavour with salt and pepper, and serve. A little pearl barley may be boiled with it if you prefer it thickened.

THE MEMENTO.

Tis but a withered rose she gave him long ago,
And ah! the footsteps drag so limp and slow,
And silver is the erstwhile raven hair,
But next his heart the rose leaf nestles there!

Oh, rather, rose-leaf ashes; for a breath
Would sweep the aged keepsake to its death,
But in his swiftly-nearing coffin lid
The rose-leaf, once so fragrant, will be hid.

'Twas but a tiny circlet that she wore
Upon her wasted finger—till no more
Could it retain its erstwhile firmer hold;
But Love, immutable as gold,

Replaced the shining emblem on that day
When those thin hands upon her bosom lay,
And in that other long-closed coffin lid
The circlet like the rose-leaf shall be hid.

BESSIE.—First dip it in clean cold water, then spread it on a table, and with a nail-brush and soap scrub it well all over, giving special attention to any stained parts. When all dirt is removed, rinse up and down in cold water to rinse off the suds; hang in a cool place and let it run dry.

MIGNON.—Get some finely powdered French chalk and mix it with warm water till it is about as thick as cream. Put this on the spots, rubbing it lightly in. Put a sheet of blotting-paper over the spots, and press with a warm iron till dry. Then brush off the chalk with a quite clean cloth or brush.

CINDERELLA.—Take a piece of new flannel and dip it in spirits of wine. Rub with the grain of the satin, turning the flannel as it gets soiled. Any light colour may be cleaned in this way. White satin shoes should always be kept in blue paper, or the satin gets discoloured.

MACKINTOSH.—Mackintoshes, when dirty, can be easily cleaned at home. Spread out the garment flat on the table, and scrub with warm water and yellow soap in which a little carbonate of ammonia has been dissolved. Rinse in cold water and hang in the air to dry. On no account put it near the fire.

COLONIAL.—There is what might be called an international prejudice against the use of coloured troops by one European nation at war with another, as we are at present, the Boers being quite as European as our own African-born colonists; but it does not amount to a law or prohibition.

LADY SLAVEY.—Let bedroom carpets be thoroughly beaten, then swept daily, all rugs lifted and effectually cleaned, and bedclothes especially vigorously shaken in the open air, thereafter, if possible, hung over ropes in the breeze for a time; in that way both insects and eggs are got rid of, and process is often promptly successful.

MISFORTUNE.—If letters sent by you to an address are not returned, that proves them to have been delivered to the parties addressed, otherwise they should have come back through the dead letter office; letters are similarly returned to this country from the United States when not delivered, but you can write the postmaster in the town to which letters were sent, and through him ascertain what has become of them.

TROUBLED MAID.—If you explained to your admirer that, unless he discontinued his attentions, you will have to complain to your father, he will not wait to be turned out, but will see that any further attempt on his part to win your affection is useless, and he will not trouble you any more.

CURIOS.—A sounding-board communicates the vibration near it to the whole mass of air, and is best when perpendicular to the vibrations. A sounding-board placed near an instrument or on an orchestra, and connected by a metallic with a sounding-board in a distant apartment, will contain every tone in miniature like the figure of a landscape in the focus of a lens.

L. G. B.—The custom of Twelfth Night merry-making is of great antiquity. The Romans introduced it into England, and offered cakes to the great mother, Cybele. They at the Christmas festival drew lots for king and queen by placing a piece of money into the middle of a cake, and saluting the discoverer as the king or queen.

BEATRICK.—If it is of good quality put it out in a shower of rain, letting the outside only get wet. It will too dried up hundreds of them are recovered in this way every year, but with poor quality goods you can very rarely do anything for them. They usually either remain hard or else go into splits wherever there happens to be a crease.

FOLLY.—It is a matter in which a girl must be guided by her good sense and her good taste. To say that you must never accept the escort of another gentleman anywhere when your lover is not at hand to perform the service is too unreasonable, but it may not have been meant to have been taken literally. You yourself must be the best judge of whether there was just cause for such a remark.

WORMEN.—If it has only developed quite lately, it may be that a careful diet may help you to reduce your stoutness. All farinaceous food is fattening, so sugar, and malt liquors should be dispensed with entirely. A little lemon juice every day is a good thing. Squeeze the juice of a lemon in a little water and take without sugar. Of course, take as much outdoor exercise as you can possibly manage.

ROSS.—In the ordinary acceptation of the word, an elocutionist is one who speaks well so far as articulation is concerned, whereas an orator is one who can make a good and telling speech even though his articulation may not be of the best. An elocutionist may be a mere reciter of other people's words, but you would not call a man an orator if he read a speech written by someone else.

UNHAPPY.—If a young man joins the army, states that he is eighteen years of age and looks it, the authorities will not release him on discovering that he is under age; if you know where your son enlisted, go at once to the recruiting officer there and state the facts, or write to colonel of his regiment, who may favourably consider the case; the fact that the nation is at war may induce the authorities to refuse your request.

INVALID.—We should not advise a woman over middle age to sue her father for alimony, even though she is left incapable for work by some physical cause, but she should ask assistance from the parochial authorities, and leave them to settle with the father; as far as his present contribution fails to maintain the woman, they must supplement it, and in order to relieve themselves of that liability they will do all that law allows to make him pay more.

K. G.—Take a newspaper, fold it small, dip it in a basin of clean, cold water. When thoroughly wet squeeze it out as you do a sponge; then rub it pretty hard all over the surface of the glass, taking care that it is not so wet as to run down in streams; in fact, the paper must only be completely moistened, or dampened all through. Let it rest a few moments; then go over the glass with a piece of fresh, dry newspaper till it looks clean and bright.

CHLOE.—To take stubborn stains from white goods nothing is better than chloride of lime. This should be made in the following way and bottled, so as to be ready for use when required. Dissolve two pounds of washing-soda in two quarts of water; boil ten minutes, take from the fire, and add one pound of chloride of lime. Cool quickly, bottle, and keep tightly corked. To use, add six parts of hot water to one part of this mixture; lay the stained part in it, keep moving till the stain disappears, and then at once rinse in several lots of hot water. This removes all colour from the fabric, so must only be used for white goods.

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AWAY UP IN THE AIR.

IN America they have recently been erecting business buildings from fifteen to twenty-four stories high; and the upper floors rent for almost or quite as much as the lower ones.

The possibility of this is, of course, due to the development of the lift, or "elevator," as our cousins over there name it. I personally know of one of these tall buildings, in the *twenty-third* story of which there is a fine and flourishing restaurant. I dined up there one summer day last year, and might have tossed a loaf of bread down on the weather vane of the highest church steeple in the city.

But there! It is the lifting machine that does it. Any arrangement that takes us off the earth, without putting us to trouble and exertion, opens a new area of existence. Do you imagine I should have eaten a chop in the twenty-third story of that Tower of Babel if I had been obliged to climb twenty-two long flights of stairs to get there?

Scarcely; for of all the various ways of making a man's legs ache, and taking the breath out of him, climbing stairs beats the band. There is no better test of the elasticity and toughness of the muscles, and of the conditions of one's heart and breathing apparatus.

All of which brings me round to the spot I ought, perhaps, to have started from—Mrs. Turner and her troubles. She says that for ten years or more she was bothered with indigestion—or dyspepsia, if you care to call it that; it is exactly the same thing. The luxury of a good appetite was to her only a dim and fading memory; she ate as a tired and sleepy sentry walks—only because she had to.

And even then she was punished for it; for after she had taken (most carefully did she select it) a meal of victuals, she was sure to suffer from pain and misery at the stomach, chest and sides.

"My breathing," she says, "alarmed and worried me quite as much as any of the other symptoms of my complaint. Sometimes it almost seemed as if my breath were going altogether out of my body, as a bird flies out of a cage when the door is left open. I got about on the level fairly well, but when I tried

to climb stairs I had to stop and gasp on every step. The effort would set my heart jumping and beating; and I caught mouthfuls of air as you have seen children clutch at bits of down floating through a room.

"In hope of relief I tried one kind of medicine after another, but for years I never had the good fortune to find the right one. I was very, very weak, and did my work only in the half-way fashion that people must do it in, who have the will without the power.

"At length I chanced to read in a newspaper about how persons troubled with the same ailment had been entirely cured by Mother Seigel's Syrup after having suffered as much and as long as I had. I began taking it, and the first bottle did me so much good I felt convinced it would help me out. I continued using the Syrup, and in a little time it did for me what the paper said it had done for so many other afflicted ones.

"I became able to eat and digest, and my breathing got to be as free and easy as when I had no disease to depress and half suffocate me. I could go up stairs quickly and lightly as a girl. I slept well and gained strength with every dose of this wonderful remedy. I am now in excellent health, and give all the credit to Mother Seigel's Syrup."—Mrs. Mary Turner, Ragg Cottage, Alswere, South Molton, March 17, 1899.

"Five years," writes another, "I went through the wretchedness of indigestion. I had pain at the chest, and all the other symptoms and consequences of that common and dreadful complaint. Nothing did me any good until I began using Mother Seigel's Syrup. This speedily cured me, and I have never had the trouble since. I know of nothing that is so sure and quick in breaking up a cold as the Syrup."—Mrs. Charlotte Snodin, 52, Hunter Street, Northampton, January 24, 1899.

It is all of a piece. Whether we want to work at this, that, or the other; to dig ditches or climb stairs we must get the digestion right; and *there* is where Mother Seigel's Syrup has a place pretty much to itself.